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TWO DISCOURSES

ON THE

UNITY OF THE CHURCH,

HER

DIVISIONS, AND THEIR REMOVAL.

TO WHICH IS SUBJOINED,

A SHORT VIEW OF THE PLAN OF RELIGIOUS REFORMATION ORIGINALLY ADOPTED IN THE SECESSION.

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EDINBURGH:

PRINTED FOR WILLIAM BLACKWOOD, EDINBURGH; AND T. CADELL, AND W. DAVIES, STRAND, LONDON.

1821.

Caw & Elder, Printers.

PRINCETON THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

DISCOURSE I.

EZEKIEL xxxvii. 19.—"*They shall be* ONE *in* "*mine hand.*"

THE reduction of the Jews from the Babylonian captivity was one of the most signal deliverances wrought in behalf of the ancient people of God. It was not, indeed, immediately effected by miraculous power and the exhibition of visible signs and wonders, like the eduction of their fathers from the House of bondage; but it was attended with the most convincing proofs of extraordinary providential interposition. And such was the magnitude of the mercy itself, the change on the national character which accompanied it, and the connection in which it stood with the ulterior plans of Heaven, that it so far threw into shade, and took the place of that deliverance which had hitherto been commemorated in the sacred invocations of every pious and patriotic Israelite. "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no

more be said, The LORD liveth that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The LORD liveth that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them*."

This joyful event had been announced by the prophet Isaiah, who named Cyrus as the prince who should "say to Jerusalem, Thou shalt be built, and to the temple, Thy foundation shall be laid." The period at which it would happen was defined in the prophecies of Jeremiah, which contain a magnificent description of the overthrow of Babylon. The predictions of Ezekiel, while they confirm those which had been previously given out, add to them facts which are deeply interesting and permanently instructive. In the preceding chapter we are told that God would not only restore Israel to their own land, but also produce a change on their hearts and conduct. The whole house of Israel were polluted with guilt, and especially with the sin of idolatry. Neither mercies nor judgments had hitherto been sufficient to divorce and separate them from their idols. But their captivity and release should be sanctified and blessed for producing a real and lasting reformation. They should be made the objects of pardoning mercy, and the subjects of renewing grace. "Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean; from all your filthiness and from all your idols will I cleanse you. A new heart also will

* Jer. xvi. 4, 5. comp. Isa. xliii. 18, 19.

I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments and do them *."

Two objections of great force would present themselves to the minds of the Jews when told that their captivity should be turned back; and these are removed in the chapter before us. Crushed under the irresistible power of their conquerors, trodden under foot, scattered, exanimated, they could only sigh out, "Our hope is lost; we are cut off for our part!" To enable him to meet this objection, Ezekiel was "carried in the spirit" into the midst of a valley full of bones, bleached and dry; and while he prophesied to them by divine direction, "behold, the bones came together, bone to his bone," and on a sudden the appearance of the valley was changed from that of a field of slaughter, into the site of a grand military review. Those whose "bones were scattered at the grave's mouth" stood up not only in the attitude of living men, but "every man in his own order," and all together united and marshalled—"an exceeding great army." The prophet then addressed the captives in God's name, "Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves,—and shall put my Spirit in you, and ye shall live.

This emblematical vision went far to solve the

* Chap. xxxvi. 25—27.

second objection, which is completely removed in the words of our text. He who believes in the resurrection of a dead people will not despair of the cure of a divided people. He who has seen "the bones come together, bone to his bone," is prepared to witness the congregating of living men, every one to his fellow. The second objection was founded on the dissention which had subsisted among the people of Israel since the death of Solomon, when ten tribes were violently rent from the royal house of David, and formed themselves into a separate and independent kingdom. What was at first a political division soon produced an ecclesiastical schism, and led to the establishment and practice of a worship at Dan and Bethel, different from and opposite to the worship of God at Jerusalem. This dissention between the families of Judah and Israel still remained; and was there not reason to fear, if they were restored to their own land, that, like "a root bearing wormwood and gall," it would again "spring up and trouble them?" Against the fears of this, the prophet was instructed to comfort the "prisoners of hope," first by exhibiting a sign, and then by explaining its meaning. In the instructions which God has been pleased to convey to men, sublimity is blended with condescension: the emblem formerly presented to the prophet was grand; the sign which he now shewed to the people was familiar. He was directed to take two sticks, or, as the word also signifies, *thin plates* of wood, so fashioned as that, when brought into contact,

they should unite into one piece, and having inscribed on them severally the distinctive names of the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel, he was to join them in his hand before the people. To their inquiry, "Shew us what thou meanest by these," he was to answer: "Thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will take the stick of Joseph, and put it with the stick of Judah, and THEY SHALL BE ONE IN MINE HAND; they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all." They were to become one nation in respect not only of civil polity, but also of religious communion and privileges. For it is added, "I will set my sanctuary in the midst of them for evermore:—my tabernacle also shall be with them; yea, I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

This promise was fulfilled on the restoration from the captivity, when the inveterate schism between Judah and Israel was perfectly healed. Some interpreters regard it as a prediction of what was to happen in New Testament times; and we can scarcely doubt that the blessings promised, in all their extent, could only be enjoyed during this period: For it follows, "David (a name often given to Messiah by the prophets) my servant shall be King over them, and they shall all have one Shepherd;" and again, "My servant David shall be their prince for ever." But without resting on this, we mean to take the primary application of the passage as a foundation for the subsequent discourse. There is a wonderful analogy in the divine dispensa-

tions towards the Church at different periods. The duties, the temptations, the sins, the punishments, and the deliverances of the people of God in former times, are all instructive and admonitory. The Spirit of wisdom has selected for insertion in the inspired records, with more or less detail, those facts which were calculated to be most generally and permanently useful. In the New Testament the name of Babylon, and the language and imagery employed by the prophets in describing the power and the overthrow of that idolatrous and persecuting empire, are transferred to the reign and ruin of the Antichristian kingdom; and upon the same principle, are not we warranted to apply, for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness, the description of a contemporary mercy bestowed upon the Church of God, which was intimately connected with her internal and most vital interests?

On a text of this kind there is a danger of tracing analogies that are more fanciful and ingenious than real and solid, and of rearing general principles on the basis of accidental circumstances. We shall endeavour to guard against this, by keeping in eye the analogy of faith, and the lights thrown on the subject of our text from other parts of Scripture. The subject of discourse is the divisions of the Church, and the remedy of this mournful malady. I propose not to treat it at large, but only to lay before you a few observations, which, through the blessing of the Divine Spirit, may be useful for establishing

your faith, and directing your exercise. The subject is not only of great extent; it is also of very delicate discussion. When we are beside *the waters of strife*, O how needful the Perfect Illumination—the mystic Urim and Thummim which was upon Levi, whom God "proved at Massah, and strove with at the waters of Meribah!" May we have our ears attent to "the word behind us," *the Daughter of a voice* *, saying, "This is the way, when we turn to the right hand, and when we turn to the left;" and may you have wisdom to "consider what we say," and to "judge of your ownselves what is right."

For the sake of order I shall arrange what I have to say under the following heads:

I. Of the Unity of the Church.

II. Of its Divisions.

III. Of the Removal of these, and the Restoration of its violated Unity.

I. I begin with the consideration of the Unity of the Church. For ages previous to the announcing of the oracle in our text, Judah and Israel had been divided into two nations in respect of civil concerns and of religious faith and practice; but God at first made them one. The Church of Christ has been divided for a still longer period, and to a still greater degree; but "from the beginning it was not so." Originally

* The Jewish writers say, That God revealed his mind during the standing of the tabernacle by *Urim and Thummim*; during the first temple by *the Prophets*; and during the second by *Bath-kol*, or *the Daughter of a voice*. This last, they suppose, is referred to in Isa. xxx. 21.

it was one, and it ought still to be one, according to Divine will and institution.

The Unity of the Church is implied in the most general view we can take of its nature, as a society instituted for religious purposes. True religion is essentially one, even as God, its object, is one. It, as its name imports, *binds* its professors to one another, as well as to the sole and common object of their supreme homage and service. It is indeed the great bond of human society in all its various and graduated relations; preserving the unity and peace of families, neighbourhoods, and nations, strengthening the subordinate ties by which they are connected, and preventing men from becoming a prey to each other, "as the fishes of the sea and as the creeping things that have no ruler." Hence, from the violation of the bonds of humanity, consanguinity, and mutual faith, so general among his countrymen, a prophet infers that they must have previously renounced the relation in which they stood to their Common Parent: "Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us? why do we deal treacherously every man against his brother by profaning the covenant of our fathers* ?" If such is the remote, and (if I may so call it) extrinsic influence of religion, what must its direct operation be within the pale of its own sacred enclosure?

Consider the Church, again, in its more specific form, as a society consisting of men called out of the world lying in wickedness; and it will be still

* Mal. ii. 10.

more evident that oneness is its attribute. It is founded on supernatural revelation—on the promise of a Saviour, and a divinely instituted worship. By their profession of faith in the former, and their observance of the latter, " the sons of God" were united in the patriarchal age. When an extensive system of ceremonial and sacrifical service, intended to prefigure the redemption to be procured by " the seed of the woman" and " of Abraham," as well as to preserve the knowledge of the one true God in the world, was superinduced on the original revelation ; the nation of Israel was embodied into a Church or sacred confederation, to be a peculiar people unto God, a holy nation, a kingdom of priests. God delights to speak of that people, as well as of himself, in the singular number : " Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God is one Lord.—Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name *." " I will say, It is my people, and they shall say, The Lord is my God †." The stranger who embraced the true religion, in "joining himself to the Lord," did at the same time " cleave to the house of Jacob," and " surname himself by the name of Israel‡." " One law, and one manner, and one ordinance, shall be for you of the congregation, and also for the stranger that sojourneth with you ; as ye are, so shall the stranger be before the Lord§."—By the death of Christ, " the middle wall

* Deut. vi. 4. x. 20. † Zech. xiii. 19. ‡ Isa. lvi. 3. comp. chap. xix. 1. xliv. 5. § Numb. xv. 15. 16.

of partition—the law of commandments contained in ordinances," which was at the same time a token of the enmity between God and sinners, and an occasion of distance and alienation between Jews and Gentiles, was abolished; and believing Jews and Gentiles were reconciled to God and united into one body. But by being diffused the Church was not divided; she did not lose her unity by becoming ecumenical, and being no longer confined to a single nation. When she received a command to "enlarge the place of her tent, and spread forth the curtains of her habitation", to receive the converts who came under her shelter, she was at the same time instructed to "lengthen her cords and strengthen her stakes*." Divine wisdom made such changes on the external form of her worship and communion as were adapted to the extended and continually enlarging ground which was now allotted to her. There was no longer to be a sacred house to serve as a visible centre of unity; nor a material altar on which alone it was lawful to sacrifice; nor a single family whose right it was exclusively to minister in the temple and at the altar. But still there remained visible bonds and badges of unity among the members of the Christian Church. "There is one body, and one spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling: One Lord, one faith, one baptism: One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all†." "For

* Isa. liv. 2. 3. † Eph. iv. 4—6.

we being many are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread*."

The unity of the church, in profession, worship, and holy walking, was strikingly exemplified in the primitive age of Christianity. Those who "gladly received the word were baptized and added to the church," consisting of the Apostles and other disciples; and they "continued stedfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers." And, after their number was still farther augmented by the addition of many thousands, "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul†." This union was not confined to those who lived together, but all of them in every place formed one sacred "brotherhood." How solemn, earnest, and reiterated are the apostolical injunctions to preserve this unity, and to avoid every thing that has a tendency to violate or mar it! "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement ‡." "I, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long-suffering, forbearing one another in love; endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace§." "If there be any consolation in Christ,

* 1 Cor. x. 17. † Acts ii 41, 42. iv. 32. ‡ 1 Cor. i. 10. § Eph. iv. 1—3.

if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like-minded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind:—that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the Gospel*." "Now, the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like-minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus, that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ †."

It will assist us in forming correct notions on this subject, if we attend to certain distinctions which are commonly made in treating it. We usually speak of the Church of the *Old* and of the *New* Testament, or the *Jewish* and *Christian* Churches. But the difference between these is only in degree, not specifical or essential. The change made on her external form and institutions, at the coming of Christ, though great, did not destroy the oneness of the Church; just as our personal identity is not affected by the changes which we undergo, in body and mind, while we pass from childhood to maturity. She remained the same; as the heir does after reaching majority, although no longer under tutors and governors; and as the olive tree does after a great part of its natural branches have been broken off, and others, taken from a wild tree, have been grafted in their room‡. —Again, it is usual to distinguish between the

* Philip. i. 27. ii. 1. 2. † Rom xv 5, 6. ‡ Gal. iv. 1—3, 8, 9 Rom. xi. 17—24.

invisible and the *visible* Church. The former consists of such only as are true believers and real saints; the latter of all who make a public profession of the true religion. But this does not imply that there are two Churches, but only that the same society is considered in a different point of view. Nor is it a division of the whole into its parts. It does not mean, that one part of the church is visible and another invisible; but it means, that all who make a profession of the faith compose the church considered as visible, while those among them who are endued with true faith constitute the church considered as invisible. The former includes the latter; and it is sometimes spoken of in Scripture under the one and sometimes under the other view. But whether the church of Christ be viewed in its internal or external state, unity is still its attribute. All genuine saints are invisibly and vitally united to Christ, and to one another, by the indissoluble bond of the Spirit and of faith; and in virtue of this it is that they increase in love and holiness, and are at last made "perfect in one." Some of the particulars specified in the passages of Scripture quoted above refer more immediately to this invisible union; but others of them are as evidently descriptive of the character and privileges of a visible society, actuated by the spirit of true religion, and subsisting in a state of due subjection to the word and laws of Christ.—Again, the church may be considered either as *catholic* or as *particular*. This distinction is not inconsistent with its unity any more than the for-

mer. The visible church considered as catholic or universal, consists of all those throughout the world who profess the true religion, together with their children. The variety of particular churches, when regularly constituted, does not imply any separation from or opposition to one another. The catholic church subsists in and is composed of the several particular churches, of larger or less extent, in the different parts of the Christian world; and none of these are to be excluded from it as long as they retain the true and distinctive characters of such a society as the word of God describes it to be. That these particular churches should be sometimes found disunited, and in many respects opposed to one another, is an accidental circumstance arising from their imperfect state and corruption. So far as this is the case catholic unity is marred; yet this does not prevent them from having still some common points of union, and a common relation to the universal body—the one great diffusive flock, family, and kingdom, of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Christianity being intended for general diffusion through the world, must in its nature be adapted to all countries and people. It would be extreme weakness to suppose, that its being embraced by people of different garbs, colour, and language, of different manners and customs, barbarous or civilized, or formed into distinct civil communities and living under different forms of government, produces different religions, or a diversity of churches, provided their faith and practice are intrinsically the

same. Their formularies of faith and religious service may be differently expressed or arranged, and they may vary from one another in different circumstances in external administrations, which are not, and could not be, prescribed by positive rule in Scripture, and which (to use a much abused word) may be called circumstantial, without marring that unity of faith and that fellowship which belongs to different Christian societies, as parts of the same general body. Nor is simple ignorance in some and knowledge in others, with respect to some things which belong to the Christian system, or greater and less degrees of advancement in different churches, or in the members of the same church, necessarily inconsistent with religious unity and peace. But there must be no denial or restriction of the supreme authority by which every thing in religion is ruled ; no open and allowed hostility to truth and godliness ; and no such opposition of sentiments, or contrariety of practices, as may endanger the faith, or destroy the constitution and edification of churches, or as may imply, in different churches, or in different parts of the same church, a condemnation of one another.

As there were synagogues among the Jews, so there must be assemblies among Christians for divine worship and instruction, and for the exercise of discipline. The unity of the church requires that we join in communion with our fellow Christians, in the place where providence has cast our lot, provided they are found walking by the common rule of Christianity,

and as long as no sinful bar is laid in the way of such a conjunction. And our statedly holding communion with a particular church is the ordinary way of manifesting our communion with the catholic church. But as individual Christians are not at liberty to walk and act singly, so neither are particular congregations at liberty to act as independent and disjointed societies. For the ordinary performance of religious duties, and the ordinary management of their own internal affairs, they may be said to be complete churches, and furnished with complete powers. But extraordinary cases will arise among themselves from time to time; and there are, besides, duties, dangers, and interests, which do not properly or exclusively concern one congregation, or a few congregations, and which require the joint cognizance and co-operation of many. This is taught by the light of nature itself, it flows from the oneness of the Church of Christ, and is clearly exemplified in the New Testament. Being similar parts of the same general body, it is the duty of particular churches to draw together, to combine, and to co-operate, according as this may be practicable, and as providence may open a door for it, with a view to mutual help and the promotion of the common cause in which they are all engaged. They may agree in explicitly approving of the same articles of faith and rules of discipline, and in yielding a scriptural subjection to a common authority in the Lord. Such confederations, on the presbyterian plan, are fully warranted by the word of God, and

are most congenial to the spirit of Christianity, which is catholic and diffusive; they may include all the churches in the same neighbourhood, in the same nation, or even in many nations; and by means of them that unity which belongs essentially to the whole church of Christ is formally recognized, and its bonds are strengthened and drawn more close.

Is it then asked, What is the bond of unity in the church? the reply may be given in one word—The true religion. Religion, as communicated by God to men in the Bible, is its grand comprehensive bond. This specificates and distinguishes it from the unity which belongs to other societies. The sacred Scriptures not only exhibit the model after which the church is to be constructed; they also furnish that which gives it substance, and stability, and order, and proportion and unity. It is "built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone, in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord *." But, before leaving this part of the subject, it may be proper to specify more particularly some of the scriptural bonds of unity in the Church.

1. This unity consists in her having one Head and Lord. This is Jesus Christ, whom the "one God and Father of all" has appointed over his house. "Holding the head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment

* Eph. ii. 20, 21.

ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God*." All real believers are internally joined to the Lord, and derive their spiritual life and growth from him; and in like manner must Christians, in their associated capacity, be in professed subjection to him, in his divine mediatorial authority, as the one Universal Pastor, and sole Head of government. To admit a temporal head of the Church, whether pope or king, to call any man master in religion, or to enlist ourselves under the banners of any human leader, is to sin against the first precept of Christian unity.

2. The unity of the faith. "There is one body," because there is "one faith." A system of faith or of revealed truth, as well as of duties, has in every age formed an essential and important part of true religion. By embracing this the Church is distinguished from other societies, and it belongs to her faithfully to confess and hold it forth to the world. An owning of the whole faith is implied in her reception of the Scriptures; she is bound to obey the calls of providence in explicitly confessing and contending for particular articles of it; and there is no article of divine truth that may not at one time or another become the object of this duty, and consequently a test of her fidelity. Hence, she is called "the city of truth", as well as "the habitation of righteousness;" her gates are open to receive "the righteous nation that keepeth the truth;" and truth

* Col. ii. 19.

is inscribed on her columns, and on the banners which float on her walls and bulwarks. When this is not the case, Christian societies are destitute of the unity of the Church of Christ, by whatever ties they may be kept together.

3. "One baptism," and fellowship in the same acts of worship. Baptism is a solemn badge of Christian profession, as well as a sign of the grace and privileges of the New Covenant. According to the proper and original design of this ordinance, and the profession accompanying it, all the baptized are made one, and a foundation is laid for their mutual fellowship in all acts of worship. The institutions of the Gospel were intended as a bond of union among Christians, and by the joint celebration of them their communion is maintained and expressed. "By one Spirit we are all baptized into one body." "And being many we are one bread and one body, for we are all partakers of that one bread," in the sacramental communion*. It is not necessary to this unity that Christians should all meet for worship in the same place. This is physically impossible; nor are we to conceive of church communion as local. It consists in their celebrating the same holy ordinances—in their performing acts of worship the same in kind, wherever they assemble, and in their being disposed and ready to embrace every proper occurring opportunity to join with all "those who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ, the Lord, both theirs and ours."

* 1 Cor. x. 17. xii. 13.

Thus it was, as we have seen, in the primitive Church; and thus it would still be, if catholic unity were preserved, and if the institutions of Christ, along with the faith to which they relate, were every where preserved pure and entire.

4. Unity in respect of external government and discipline. Christ, the head of the Church, "gave pastors and teachers—helps, governments, for the work of the ministry, for the gathering together of the saints, for the edifying of the body, till they all come in the unity of the faith, and knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man*." The exercise of authority and government is necessary as a bond of union and a basis of stability, in all societies. By means of it the largest communities, and even many nations, may be made to coalesce and become one, under the same political government. And can any good reason be assigned for supposing that the Church of Christ should be destitute of this bond, or that it should not be necessary to her union as a visible society? If every family has its economy and discipline, if every kingdom has its form of government and laws, shall we suppose that the most perfect of all societies, "the house of tho living God," and "the kingdom of heaven," should be left by her Divine Head without that which so evidently tends to the maintenance of her faith, the purity and regularity of her administrations, and the order, subordination, unity,

* Eph. iv. 11—13. 1 Cor. xii. 28.

and peace which ought to reign among all her members? Whatever is necessary to her government, and the preserving of her order and purity, either is expressly enjoined in Scripture, or may be deduced, by native inference, from the general rules and the particular examples which are recorded in it.

5. The bond of mutual charity and peace. This is the silken cord which ought to be thrown over all the others, and which makes Christian union complete. Hence, charity, or love, is called by an Apostle a perfect bond: "Above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness *." A vague and erratic charity, which soars above fixed principles of belief, looks down with neglect on external ordinances, and spurns the restraint of ordinary rules, whether it seeks to include all Christians within its catholic embrace, or confines itself to those of a favourite class, is a very feeble and precarious bond of union. True Christian Charity is the daughter of Truth, and fixes on her objects "for the truth's sake which dwelleth in them." On the other hand, a bare and cold agreement in the articles of a common faith, and external uniformity in the acts of worship and discipline, will not preserve the unity of the church. To "be perfectly joined together," Christains must be of "the same mind", or affection, as well as of "the same judgement." It is by "speaking the truth in love," that they "grow up in all things to their head, even Christ." Love must cement the union which

* Col. iii. 14.

faith has formed; and it is by the joint influence of both that Christains "cleave to the Lord," and to one another in him, "with purpose of heart." Without mutual affection, and its kindred graces, mutual consideration and condescension and compassion, forgiveness will not be extended towards injuries, forbearance will not be exercised towards unavoidable infirmities, offences will arise, alienations will be produced, and "the brotherly covenant will not be remembered." Hence, the frequency and the fervour with which the cultivation of a loving and peaceful temper is enjoined upon Christians. "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye *." "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you†." "Let nothing be done through strife or vain-glory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others‡." "Finally brethren,—be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you§."

* Col. iii. 12, 13.
† Eph. iv. 31, 32.
‡ Philip. ii. 3, 4.
§ 2 Cor. xiii. 11.

II. I now go on to speak of the Divisions by which the unity of the church is marred. Judah and Israel, originally one, and bound together by the most sacred ties, were rent asunder, and formed into two independent nations, divided in worship, as well as in secular and political interests. And this was followed by the usual effects of such breaches—rivalship, hatred, and mutual hostilities. "Ephraim envied Judah, and Judah vexed Ephraim *." The same thing has happened to the Christian church.

1. God has permitted the unity of his church to be broken in different ways. It has been marred and interrupted when her members continued to meet together, and to keep up the external forms of fellowship as one society. This is the case, when, instead of glorifying God with one mouth, and striving together for the faith of the gospel, they entertain jarring and discordant sentiments about the articles of religion, and one is eager to destroy what another is building; when they do not walk by the same rule nor mind the same things; when they fall into factions and parties, and when contention and every evil work—hatred, variance, jealousies, heart-burnings, and evil surmisings, rage among them. The Spirit of Division had begun to produce these bitter and pernicious fruits in the church at Corinth, even in apostolical times. "It hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, that there are contentions among you. Every one

* Isaiah xi. 13.

of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or, were ye baptized in the name of Paul *?" "First of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you, and I partly believe it."—"I fear, lest when I come, I shall not find you such as I would,—lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults†."

Disorders and animosities of this kind may abate and gradually settle into a calm, without the restoration of true peace. When a church no longer holds the Head, but suffers the supreme authority of Christ in his spiritual kingdom to be invaded or shared by any creature, when the liberties and immunities which he has conferred on her, as an independent society, are usurped or surrendered, when her faith is subverted, her worship corrupted by human inventions, or her order and discipline overthrown, in such a case the bonds of scriptural unity are dissolved. Resistance may he overcome by the despotical exercise of usurped authority, opposition may die away under the paralizing influence of an irreligious indifference and neutrality; but the union which is brought about by such means is an ungodly confederacy, and the tranquillity which is enjoyed by such a society is like the calm which binds the stagnant and deleterious waters of the Dead Sea.

At other times, the dissentions which arise in

* 1 Cor. i. 11, 12. † chap. xi. 16, and 2 ep. xiii. 20.

the church prevail, and grow to such a height as to produce an open rupture, and the formation of separate and opposing communions. Even those who live in the same place, and who had formerly "taken sweet counsel together, and walked to the house of God in company," no longer join in the same acts of public and social worship. Altar is reared against altar, as if they did not serve the same God. One house can no longer contain them. One name can no longer serve them; but they must be distinguished from one another, as well as from the world. This has hitherto been the state of the Christian Church almost in every age. In reviewing her history she appears not as one great army marshalled under the banner of "the Captain of Salvation," but as "the company of two armies," yea, often of many armies, with banners bearing different and opposite inscriptions, and engaged in hostilities with one another as well as with the common enemy of the church of the living God. Thus, in ancient times, not to mention various lesser sects, the church was divided into Greeks and Latins; in more modern times, protestants have been divided into Lutherans and Calvinists, and in our own land into Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Independents, with a great variety of other denominations, which it would be painful and impossible to enumerate.

While we survey these mournful facts, my brethren, we must not overlook the hand of God; and it is proper to advert to this before proceeding to inquire into the immediate and proper sources of

the evil. The Malignant Spirit could not sow the seeds of dissension and division, nor could they grow up and spread, without the permission of the Lord of the vineyard. He has wise and holy ends for permitting them ; and among others we ought to be deeply affected with this, that he sends them as a punishment to a people called by his name. Do any ask, How comes it about that those who are joined by so many sacred bonds, should be so broken and divided in judgment and affection? The answer is: "The anger of the Lord hath divided them *." Yes ; when they fall from their first love to the gospel, receive the grace of God in vain, do not bring forth fruit unto holiness under his ordinances, become conformed to the world, and have little more than a name to live—when they become vain of their numbers and their strength, and convert a holy union into a criminal combination, he permits the Demon of discord to enter among them, "confounds their language, that so they cannot understand one another's speech,"—"divides them in Jacob and scatters them in Israel." "It is in my desire, (says he) that I should chastise them, when they shall bind themselves in their two furrows † ;" alluding to the practice of the husbandman who corrects a refractory steer when caught in the situation described in the metaphor which is employed. The conduct of God toward his ancient people is described under a beautiful allegory in the prophe-

* Lam. iv. 16. † Hos. x. 10.

cies of Zechariah. When he saw his flock a prey to their possessors, and sold by their own pityless shepherds, he exclaimed "I will feed the flock of slaughter, even you, O ye poor of the flock. And I took unto me two staves; the one I called BEAUTY, and the other I called BANDS; and I fed the flock." But they requited him ungratefully; their soul abhorred him, and his soul loathed them. "Then said I, I will not feed you; that that dieth let it die; and that that is to be cut off, let it be cut off; and let the rest eat every one the flesh of another. And I took my staff, even Beauty, and cut it asunder, that I might break my covenant which I had made with all the people." And a little after: "Then I cut asunder mine other staff, even Bands, that I might break the brotherhood between Judah and Israel *." The grand schism by which ten tribes were rent from the house of David was expressly denounced as a punishment for the sin of Solomon and his people in forsaking God †. And when the flame, instead of being extinguished, has fresh fuel added to it, and continues to spread and burn from age to age with increasing fury, it is a proof that God's "anger is not turned away, but his hand is stretched out still," as it was when "Manasseh devoured Ephraim, and Ephraim Manasseh, and they together Judah ‡."

2. Divisions in the church are owing to various causes. In permitting them God overrules the instrumentality of men who are actuat-

* Zech. xi. 7—14. † 1 Kings xi. 11. xii. 15. ‡ Isa. ix. 21.

ed by different motives and principles, for which they are entirely responsible. It is incumbent on all Christians to "endeavour to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The violation of it must be traced to a sinful cause. When dissensions arise in the Church of God, and it is divided into parties, whatever the occasion or matter of variance be, there must be guilt somewhere. The rules of truth, peace, and holy fellowship, have been transgressed; and those who are justly chargeable with this cannot be blameless. Amid the keen contests and opposing pretensions of parties, it may often be difficult to determine where the blame lies; but it must attach to one side or another, and perhaps to both. It will not always attach to the minority, or those who may be forced to withdraw from the assemblies and external communion of particular churches: the major and prevailing party may be the real schismatics, though not the formal separatists. This, however, we know, that Scripture has affixed a mark of disapprobation on those who "cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which we have received *."

The dissensions which prevail in the Church, like those which distract and break the peace of other societies, may be traced in general to the workings of human corruption. "Whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members†?" They spring from the ignorance, error,

* Rom. xvi. 17. † James iv. 1.

unbelief, prejudice, pride, passion, selfishness, carnality, which are predominant in the minds of some of the members of the Church, and are but partially subdued and mortified in the minds of the best. To specify all the ways in which these principles operate to the disturbance of the peace of the Church is impracticable.

They lead to the adoption and patronage of errors, by which the purity of the faith and institutions of Christ is depraved. This in itself, as we have seen, loosens the scriptural bonds of union. But as the faithful consider themselves bound to resist every thing of this kind, the propagation of errors cannot fail to excite contention and strife in the bosom of the church. Some of these errors strike against the principal and leading articles of the faith, and are in their very nature damnable and destructive to the souls of those who embrace them. Others consist of uncertain, vain, and unprofitable opinions, the offspring of an unsanctified fancy or of the love of novelty, calculated to unsettle the minds of the hearers, and inducing perverse disputings and endless questions. Others again strike more immediately against the unity and peace of the church—loose and extravagant notions respecting private judgment, conscience, and Christian liberty, by which these rights, invaluable when duly understood and regulated, are explained and stated in such a way as to convert all religion into a matter of individual belief and concern, to render union and co-operation among its professors impracticable or precarious, and to contradict the important

truth, that "the powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another *." This is the case, when the duty of Christians at large is explained in such a way as to encroach on the office of a regular gospel ministry: When the lawfulness of confessions of human composure, as public declarations of the faith of a church, and their usefulness as tests of orthodoxy, though conformable in their matter to Scripture, and necessary in times of abounding error among persons professing Christianity, are impugned: When ecclesiastical office-bearers are stripped of that authority which is competent to them, and necessary for preserving order and subordination, and the supreme power of finally determining every cause is lodged with the whole people in every worshipping congregation: When the combination of particular congregations, as parts of an extended and organized body, with a duly limited submission to a common judicatory for taking cognizance of differences which may arise in any part of that body, and judging of what concerns the good of the whole, is opposed: And, in fine, to pass over other tenets of a similar description which are rampant in the present age, when the lawfulness of the settlement of a system of religion in a nation, by the joint concurrence of ecclesiastical and civil authority, and with the general consent

* Westm. Conf. of Faith, chap. xx. § 4.

of the people, is contradicted and opposed. Sectarianism, as the class of opinions referred to is usually called, is inimical to the unity of the church, as it has a direct tendency to foster diversity of sentiment and practice in religion, and to multiply schisms. If the common sense and experience of mankind did not check its operation, and prevent its keenest abettors from acting rigidly and consistently on their own principles, it would lead to the dissolution of all religious society, or at best to the rearing of a Babel, the foundations of which would be laid on its first-born, and the gates of it set up on its youngest and most favourite son. To these may be added rigid notions respecting ecclesiastical communion, incompatible with the imperfect state of the church in this world, whether these manifest themselves in requiring that all Christians should reach the same degree of the scale in their acquaintance with divine things, or in withdrawing from the communion of a church on account of particular acts of maladministration, or because discipline may not, in some instances, be exercised on offenders with faithfulness, or with all that severity which they may think proportioned to the nature of the offence; which was the error charged on the ancient Novatians and Donatists.

Divisions in the church may often be traced to a spirit of vanity, pride, and ambition. Than this nothing can be more repugnant to the spirit of Christianity, or prejudicial to ecclesiastical peace. It is often found combined with a spirit of error,

and has formed a very prominent feature in the character of heresiarchs and the founders of sects. It displays itself sometimes in an overweening fondness for their own private opinions, and at other times in the love of pre-eminence, or an impatience of contradiction, by which they are instigated to the adoption of factious and divisive courses.—Others are impelled to divide the church by the base desire of gratifying their avarice, and procuring a livelihood from the disciples whom they draw after them. Such are the "unruly and vain talkers and deceivers," described by Paul, "who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not for filthy lucre's sake," and those whom another apostle charges "with beguiling unstable souls, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness *."

Tyranny and unreasonable imposition has been one fruitful source of division in the church. To gratify the lust of dominion, those calling themselves clergy have assumed a power of decreeing articles of faith and imposing forms of worship, contrary or additional to those enjoined in Scripture; have, like the Pharisees, "bound heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and laid them on men's shoulders, while they themselves would not move them with one of their fingers;" and have enforced the rigid observance of these commandments of men, by all the force and terrors which they possessed or could command. Like the shepherds of ancient Israel, they have scattered

* Tit. i. 11. 2 Pet. ii. 15.

the flock by ruling over it "with force and with cruelty." Forgetting the nature and limits of the power with which they have been entrusted, and their own complaints against papal and prelatical usurpations, protestant and presbyterian courts have acted "as Lords over God's heritage," trampled on the sacred rights of conscience, stripped the Christian people of liberties which their divine Master had conferred on them, and which they were in the undisputed possession of for several centuries after his ascension, intruded hirelings on them for overseers, and driven those who resisted their arbitrary measures to seek the food of their souls in separate communions.—The policy of statesmen has often combined with the ambition of churchmen in measures which have tended to divide the church. Jeroboam erected his schismatical worship at Dan and Bethel to keep himself and his family on the throne of Israel; for, said he, "if this people go up to do sacrifice in the house of the Lord at Jerusalem, then shall the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even Rehoboam king of Judah, and they shall kill me, and go again to Rehoboam king of Judah *." The support which civil rulers have given to corrupt systems of religion and to oppressive administrations in the church, may very frequently be traced to this origin.

While the church has been frequently divided by a spirit of unwarrantable and arbitrary impositions, so, on the other hand, the same effect has

* 1 Kings xii. 27.

been sometimes produced by aversion to the strictness of ecclesiastical communion, and impatience of that submission which is fully warranted by the word of God. When a church has been constituted conformably to the Scripture pattern, makes a faithful confession of the truth, and maintains good order and discipline agreeably to the laws of Christ, a divisive spirit is evinced by those who factiously exclaim against its severity, enter into schemes, open or covert, for relaxing its bonds, or form themselves into another society connected by looser and more general ties; whether this be done to obtain greater latitude to themselves, or with the view of uniting persons of opposite religious sentiments and practices in one general and catholic communion. This follows from the doctrine already laid down respecting the true bonds of ecclesiastical unity. In like manner the peace of the church may be broken by the insubordination and turbulence of the Christian people, refusing subjection to those pastors who are regularly set over them, and who act within the due limits of their authority, and setting up the ancient cry, "All the congregation are holy, every one of them." In this case the event often remarkably verifies the prediction of the apostle: "The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears, and they shall turn away their ears from the truth to fables*."

* 2 Tim. iv. 3, 4.

3. Divisions in the Church sometimes become inveterate, and it is a work of extreme difficulty to heal them. It is easy to divide, but not so easy to unite. A child may break or take to pieces an instrument which it will baffle the most skilful to put together and repair. If Rehoboam had listened to the advice of "the old men that stood before Solomon his father," he might have preserved his kingdom entire, but all their wisdom and authority could not cure the schism which had been caused by his following the rash and foolish counsel of "the young men who were grown up with him."

Attempts to reunite must encounter the resistance of those corrupt principles and passions which led to division. The force of these is sometimes greatly increased by indulgence, and parties become more and more alienated from one another by mutual injuries and recriminations; for "the beginning of strife is as when one letteth out water *." If time has served to allay the heat and fierceness of controversy, and to smooth down the harshness and asperities of personal animosity, it has perhaps contributed to widen the breach in another way. It has added to the original grounds of difference and separation. Parties at variance are inclined to remove to a distance from each other. They are apt not only to magnify the real point in dispute, but also to create or discover new ones, with the view of vindicating their separation, and enlarging the charges which they bring against their

* Prov. xvii. 14.

opponents. The adoption, too, of one error, and the defence of one sinful practice, leads to the adoption and defence of another, and that of a third; so that when an individual or a society has turned from the right way, every step they take carries them farther astray, and removes them to a greater distance from those who have been enabled to keep the path of truth and duty. The consequence is, on either of these suppositions, that, when proposals of accommodation come to be made, and a treaty of re-union is set on foot, the original cause of the breach forms perhaps the smallest matter of difference between the parties, and instead of one point twenty may require to be disposed of and adjusted in the progress of the negociations. This was strikingly verified in the attempts made in the seventeenth century to reconcile the Lutheran and Calvinistic Churches. If the law of Patronage had been abrogated soon after its imposition, the peace of the Church of Scotland might have been preserved, and many of those dissensions and separations which have since occurred would have been prevented; but who that knows any thing of the state of matters will say, that the adoption of such a measure at this late period, however desirable on many accounts, and whatever good results it would lead to in the issue, would put an end to our present divisions, or even unite all those who are the friends of evangelical doctrine and presbyterian principles? —Sometimes, indeed, matters take a different direction. Two parties, after separating and pur-

suing for sometime opposite courses, receive a new direction from the common impulse of the spirit of the age, and the prevailing current of religious sentiment and feeling, by means of which they are made gradually to approximate, and at last to meet at a point very remote from that from which both of them set out. In this case, if they were right before they parted, they must now be wrong. When defection from the purity of religion has become general, and indifference about truth abounds, such coalescences are easily brought about. If political considerations had not intervened, it would have been no difficult matter to have joined Judah and Israel in religious fellowship during the reign of Ahaz. It is upon a principle of the same kind, I am afraid, that we must account for the union which has lately been effected in some parts of the Continent between the two great bodies of Protestants.

It is particularly difficult to heal the divisions which subsist among those who are intermingled and live together in the same country and vicinity. If distance of place, by preventing intercourse, keeps Christians in ignorance of one another's sentiments and characters, and fosters misapprehensions and groundless prejudices, neighbourhood gives rise to other and greater evils. It is a species of intestine warfare which is carried on between religious parties who reside together. The irritation produced by the frequent opportunities which individuals find for agitating their disputes is an evil which ordinarily cures

itself in process of time. But their interests as separate societies, founded on opposite principles, necessarily interfere and clash. A spirit of proselytism is engendered. They draw disciples from one another; mutual reprisals are made; advantages are oftentimes taken which would be held not the most honourable in political warfare; and each may be said to flourish and grow by the decay and decrease of the rest.

The subject of litigation among Christians, and even the relation which they stand in to one another as such, render the adjustment of their differences more delicate and embarrassing. It is always a work of difficulty to reconcile hostile parties, whatever the matter of strife may happen to be. Once involved in litigation about civil rights and property, men, not of the most contentious or obstinate tempers, have been known to persevere until they had ruined themselves and their families. When unhappily discord and contention arise between those who are allied by blood, or who were united by the bonds of close friendship, their variance is of all others the most invetcrate and deadly. "A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city, and their contentions are like the bars of a castle *." If "love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave." Of all the ties which bind man to man, religion is the most powerful, and when once loosened or burst asunder, it is the hardest to restore. Religious differences engage and call

* Prov. xviii. 19.

into action the strongest powers of the human mind. Conscience comes to the aid of convictions of right, and zeal for the glory of God combines with that jealousy with which we watch over every thing that is connected with our own reputation. It has often been remarked, that religious disputes are managed with uncommon warmth and acrimony; and this has been urged as an argument against all controversies of the kind, and even as an argument against religion itself. It cannot be denied, that, amid the din of disputation, that important truth, "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God," has often been forgotten by the contending parties; and the personal altercations, the railing accusations, the uncharitable judgments, the rash censures, the wilful misrepresentations, the injurious calumnies, which have too often infused their malignant and poisonous virus into these debates, have, it must be confessed, contributed to bring great scandal on religion; though this sacred cause can never justly be made responsible in any degree for excesses so inconsistent with its spirit and its precepts. But let us not be unjust in seeking to be liberal. Genuine moderation and candour are not to be confounded with indifference and lukewarmness. Religion is of paramount importance, and we ought not to wonder that those who are in earnest about it should display a warm and fervent zeal in the cause. They do not feel themselves at liberty to make the same sacrifices to peace in the "matters of the Lord," which they may be warranted and

willing to make in their own. They must "buy the truth, but not sell it." True religion is an entailed inheritance, which they are bound to preserve and transmit, unalienated and unimpaired, to their posterity, "that the generation to come may know it, even the children that shall be born, who shall arise and declare it to their children." They are only "stewards of the mysteries of God, and it is required in stewards, that they be found faithful." In proportion, therefore, as they are persuaded, that the honour of God, and the interests of truth, and the welfare of souls are concerned in the subjects which are litigated, and enter into the grounds of difference between them and other Christians, it may be expected that they will shew themselves firm and tenacious. And, as this must be supposed to be the persuasion of persons of different parties, and indeed of all who maintain a separate communion on conscientious principles, it is easy to perceive what an obstacle it presents in the way of conciliation and union.

Feelings of personal offence and injury form no inconsiderable obstacle in the way of removing divisions in the Church. In one degree or another these are unavoidable, when religious differences arise and grow to a height. They are no proper ground of separation, and the recollection of them ought not to be allowed to stand in the way of a desirable re-union. If in any instance personal injury has been combined with injuries done to truth, those who have been the sufferers need to exert the utmost jealousy over

their own spirits. Self-love will lead us insensibly to confound and identify the two; and what we flatter ourselves to be pure zeal for religion and hatred of sin, may, in the process of a rigid and impartial examination, be found to contain a large mixture of resentment for offences which terminated on ourselves. Perhaps we have, while endeavouring to act faithfully, been evil-entreated by those with whom we were connected in church fellowship. If we permit a sense of this to rankle in our breasts, or even to live in our recollections, if by recurring to it in our conversations, although without any angry or revengeful feelings, we transfuse it into the minds of others, this will infallibly operate in preventing or embarrassing any negociation for peace, however fair and promising in itself. Or, let us reverse the case. Perhaps we have behaved ourselves unkindly and harshly to our brethren, we may have been instrumental in spoiling them of their goods for conscience' sake, we may, from mistake or misapprehensions of them, have cast out their names as evil, reproached, misrepresented, calumniated them. Let not the consciousness of this keep us at a distance from them; let us not do them farther injury by harbouring the thought that they cannot forgive or forget the offences which they have received. They are men "of another spirit;" they know how much need they themselves have of forgiveness; and will be forward to prevent our acknowledgements, and dissipate our apprehensions, by saying to us, not in the spirit of assumed superiority, but in the

bowels of brotherly kindness, " Be not grieved, neither be angry with yourselves."

In surveying the causes which obstruct a desirable re-union of Christians, we cannot overlook the influence of party-spirit, and unreasonable respect to the credit of particular sects and denominations. The only thing that can warrant the establishment of separate communions is their being necessary for asserting and maintaining the purity of the truths and institutions of Christ. As soon as this object is gained, they become unnecessary and useless, and ought to cease and disappear. It is not the name of any party, or of its founder or leader, but the name of Jesus Christ, that must " endure for ever," and every true lover of him will be disposed to say with his harbinger, " He must increase, but I must decrease," and will rejoice in seeing the saying verified. Provided the scriptural doctrines which they have been honoured to maintain be acknowledged and embraced, the enlightened friends of religion will cheerfully consent that the names of Protestants and Calvinists, and Presbyterians and Seceders, together with the parties designated by them, should be forgotten and sunk in the more honourable and catholic name by which " the disciples were first called at Antioch." But is this spirit common, even in an age advancing high claims to liberality? How ready are we to associate our own honour with that of the religious society to which we belong, and under the influence of this compound feeling to forget the paramount homage we owe to that " Name

which is above every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come!" How much does this enter into our public contendings! What regard is often shewn to it in negociations for union! Victory, not truth, is too often the object of litigant parties, and provided they can gain this, though it should be achieved by over-reaching one another, and by practising the low tricks of a worldly policy, they will boast of a religious triumph. Every candid and observing person will admit, too, that, in those religious denominations which have truth and right on their side, there are persons whose choice has not been determined by enlightened views of the importance of the cause which they have espoused, and who would stoutly resist every conciliatory measure from attachment to certain venerated names, from early associations, and preference of some external forms, which have varied in different periods and places without any infringement of the laws of Christ or any real injury to Christian edification. Even those who are not averse to sacrifice truth to peace often shew themselves keen sticklers for the credit of a party, and rather than compromise it in the slightest degree, or admit the most distant reflection on themselves or their associates, would break off or endanger the success of the most promising and reasonable overtures. With them the question is not, Can we make such concessions and accede to such terms, without relinquishing truth, and acting unfaithfully to God? but, Can we do this without constructively con-

fessing that we have been so far in an error, and acknowledging that others have been more righteous, or honest, or intelligent than we? My brethren these things ought not so to be. So long as a spirit of this kind prevails, every attempt at healing divisions in the Church will prove abortive, or will lead to such general, ambiguous, or contradictory arrangements, as merely cover over the disease, while they plant the seeds of future disquiet and disunion.

In fine, self-interest will be found a hinderance to this desirable event. How general the influence of this principle is among professed Christians in the best of times, appears from the Apostle's exclamation, "All seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ!" When undefined and sinful schemes of union and comprehension happen to be popular, self-interest will prove a powerful temptation to unfaithfulness. But it has, in every age, clogged the wheels of those noble undertakings which had for their object the public good of human society. When religious parties are established in great numbers, and have subsisted for a long period of time, the interests of individuals may come in various ways to be involved in their support and maintenance. Liberal notions often float in the head, while the heart is contracted with selfishness; and many who exclaim loudly against bigotry would not disarrange their connections, nor sacrifice their worldly interest, to promote a measure, the most decidedly advantageous to religion, and to the general welfare and peace of the Church of Christ.

If these considerations be duly weighed, we will not be greatly surprised that so little progress has been made in the work of composing differences among Christians. Since the period of the Reformation, attempts of this kind have been frequently made in reference to various parties; some proposing to unite the denominations commonly called evangelical, or which differ only as to forms of government and worship; others extending their views to Arminians and Calvinists; while others have engaged in the preposterous undertaking of effecting a reconciliation between Papists and Protestants. But though these designs have been prosecuted with great zeal, and sometimes by men of acknowledged talents and piety, whose exertions have been backed by those who had great influence with the contending parties, they have generally failed altogether, or led to no permanently good results; and sometimes they have tended to inflame the quarrel, to place the parties at a greater distance from one another, and to create new confusions and divisions.

Sensible of these difficulties, and despairing of being able to remove them by the ordinary mode of conference, explanations, and discussion, many have come to adopt the opinion that there is but one way of putting an end to the divisions of the church; that is, by abstracting totally the points of difference, consigning all the controversies which have arisen to oblivion, and bringing together the separate parties on the undebatable ground which is common to all. A remedy which

would prove worse than the disease—an expedient which would lay the basis of union on the grave of all those valuable truths and institutions which have been involved in the disputes of different parties, and which constitute the firm and sacred bonds of ecclesiastical confederation and communion.

Is this desirable event, then, altogether hopeless? Is it vain to pray for the peace of Jerusalem, or to make any attempts for its restoration? Is there no balm by whose virtue, no physician by whose skill, the bleeding wounds of the Church may be closed? Every person who "loves the truth and peace" will reply, God forbid that this should be the case!

DISCOURSE II.

EZEKIEL xxxvii. 19.—"*They shall be* ONE *in* "*mine hand.*"

HAVING taken a view of the scriptural unity of the church, and of the nature and causes of those divisions by which it is broken, let us now turn our eye to a more agreeable and cheering prospect.

III. Of the Removal of the divisions of the church, and the Restoration of her violated unity.

1. A happy reunion of the divided church is promised in the word of God. It is implied in those promises which secure to the church the enjoyment of a high degree of prosperity in the latter days—in which God engages to arise and have mercy on Zion, to be favourable to his people, pardon their iniquity and hear their prayers, cause their reproach to cease, and make them a praise, a glory, and a rejoicing, in all the

earth; in one word, in which he promises to pour out his holy Spirit and revive his work. God cannot be duly glorified, religion cannot triumph in the world, the church cannot be prosperous and happy, until her internal dissensions are abated, and her children come to act in greater unison and concert. But when her God vouchsafes to make the light of his countenance to shine upon her, and sheds down the enlightening, reviving, restorative and sanctifying influences of his Spirit, the long delayed, long wished-for day, will not be far distant. It will have already dawned.

But there are, in the Bible, promises that bear directly on this part of the Church's felicity, and pledge the divine faithfulness for the restoration of her lost peace and violated unity. Some of these I shall lay before you as grounds of your faith, and encouragements to your hopes and endeavours. I begin with the declaration of the evangelical prophet, which has been often re-echoed in the prayers of the friends of Zion, and which deserves your particular attention from its occupying a place in the midst of promises referring immediately to the times of the New Testament: "Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice together shall they sing; they shall see eye to eye when the Lord shall bring again Zion *." The divisions and distractions of the church have, in every age, been greatly owing to the conduct of her overseers and guardians. If they "follow their own spirit, and

* Isa. lii. 8.

see a lying divination," how can it be expected that they shall " go up into the gaps, to make up the hedge, or stand in the battle in the day of the Lord * ?" If in giving forth instructions respecting sin and duty, danger and safety, their voices be dissonant and contradictory, must they not cause great distress and perplexity to their people, and prove, instead of messengers of peace, " the snare of a fowler in all their ways, and hatred in the house of their God † ?" How cheering, then, the assurance that they " shall see eye to eye" in the matters of God, and lift up their united voice in " publishing salvation, and saying to Zion, Thy God reigneth !"— To this may be added another passage from the same prophecy which bears an equally undoubted reference to the latter days, although clothed in Old Testament language: " He shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the enmity ‡ of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim." Then, instead of waging an unnatural war, and forming ungodly alliances to enable them the more effectually to harrass one another, they shall, with united strength, assail the avowed enemies of religion: " They shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines; they shall lay

* Ezek. xiii. 2—5. † Mic. vii 4. Hos. ix. 8.
‡ See Bishop Lowth's note on the passage.

their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them *." The remark made as to the period referred to in the above predictions may be applied to the following, although some parts of the description relate more immediately to the deliverance from the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities: "At the same time, saith the Lord, will I be the God of ALL the families of Israel, and they shall be my people.—For there shall be a day that the watchmen on the mount Ephraim shall cry, Arise ye, and let us go up to Zion unto the Lord our God †."—" Behold I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them; and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth. And I will cause the captivity of Judah and the captivity of Israel to return, and will build them as at the first‡." Suffice it to add these two evangelical promises: " Then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the Lord, to serve him with one consent ‖."—" It shall yet come to pass, that there shall come people and the inhabitants of many cities; and the inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, Let us go speedily to pray before the Lord: I will go also. Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before him.—And the Lord shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be ONE Lord, and his name ONE §."

* Isa. xi. 12, 13. † Jer. xxxi. 1, 6. ‡ Jer. xxxiii. 6, 7.
‖ Zeph. iii. 9. § Zech. viii. 19—22. xiv. 9.

These, brethren, are "exceeding great and precious promises;" and do they not amply secure the attainment, in due time, of the blessing to which they all so evidently refer? Yes: "these are the true sayings of God"—of Him who cannot lie nor change nor call back his words. They are the sayings of him "that frustrateth the tokens of liars, and maketh diviners mad, that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish, that confirmeth the words of his servants, and performeth the counsel of his messengers *." They are "written for the generation to come, and the people that shall be created shall praise the Lord" for the fulfilment of them. Give him glory by placing your hope and confidence in his promises; and let the cheering prospect which they hold forth console and animate your hearts, amidst all the distress which you feel in contemplating the present disordered and divided state of the church. Are you still disposed to say, "How can these things be?" Do you find it difficult "against hope to believe in hope?" Consider what I have farther to say.

2. The removing of divisions, and the restoring of unity and peace to the church, is the work of God. What "the mouth of the Lord hath spoken," his hand will perform. He has not only predicted that the event shall happen, but he has promised to bring it to pass. He may employ men as "workers together with him," but

* Isa. xliv. 25, 26.

he has not left the success to depend on their exertions, and with his own irresistible and all-powerful arm will he redeem the pledge which he has given by the interposition of his sacred and inviolable word: "I will take the stick of Joseph which is in the hand of Ephraim—and put it with the stick of Judah, and they shall be one in mine hand. I will make them one nation in the land."

God is the great Pacificator, and Repairer of the breach. This is the name by which he is repeatedly called, and the truth of which he will evince, "The Lord God who gathereth the outcasts of Israel." The disorders which break out among Christians, and which destroy the unity and peace of the Church, are, as we have seen, sure marks of his divine displeasure. Because they have moved him to jealousy and provoked him by their vanities, he permits the hot burning bolts of mutual jealousy and provocation to be thrown among them. It is impossible that the fire thus kindled can be extinguished—it will continue, in spite of all exertions, to "burn with a most vehement flame," until he is reconciled, and shall have pardoned their sins. "O God, thou hast cast us off; thou hast scattered us; thou hast been displeased: O turn thyself to us again. Thou hast made the earth to tremble; thou hast broken it: Heal the breaches thereof; for it shaketh *." When he has "taken away all his wrath, and turned himself from the fierce-

* Psal. lx. 1, 2.

ness of his anger," he will "speak peace to his people and to his saints;" he will smile success on those measures which he formerly blasted with his frown; and those who wept to see "the city of their solemnities," a scene of confusion and strife, shall behold it "a quiet habitation"—the city of peace. "He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd doth his flock *."

He will establish unity on the solid and immovable basis of immutable truth and eternal righteousness. This distinguishes the work of God from the coalitions formed by the wit and policy of men. They are often so intent and eager to reach the end, that they overlook and pass by the means proper for gaining it, and are ready to sacrifice truth and communion with God, for the sake of peace and fellowship with creatures. But his "eyes are on the truth," and he bears an invariable love to judgment and righteousness. "The prophets" of the church may be "light and treacherous men, and her priests may do violence to the law; but the just Lord is in the midst thereof; HE will not do iniquity; every morning doth he bring his judgment to light: he faileth not †."

And as he cannot, consistently with his moral perfections, do what is prejudicial to truth, or injurious to any of his laws and ordinances, so he is never reduced to the necessity of having recourse to methods which involve this, in order

* Jer. xxxi. 10. † Zeph. iii. 4. 5.

to fulfil his designs and promises. "Wonderful in counsel and excellent in working," he can devise and execute a plan for accomplishing the highest ends by the best and holiest means. Call to your minds the amazing plan, conceived by "wisdom dwelling with prudence," for reconciling the world to himself, and for repairing and closing up the wide and tremendous breach opened by the apostacy of man from his Maker. Survey this "wisdom of God in a mystery," as it is now unfolded by the gospel. Consider the disposition of its parts, the perfect adaptation of the means to the end, and the nice adjustment of each of these means to the rest. See how it tends to vindicate the authority of the divine law, to assert the honour of the supreme lawgiver, and to stamp heaven's broadest, blackest brand of infamy on sin, at the same time that it provides a way of escape and salvation to the rebellious sinner. See those attributes of Deity, whose claims were apparently conflicting and irreconcilable, harmonizing and conspiring together to promote the gracious design, reflecting lustre upon one another, mingling their rays and concentrating their lights, until at last they burst forth in one united blaze of glories, more effulgent and overwhelming than is to be seen in all the other works of God. See "Mercy and Truth meeting together; Righteousness and Peace kissing each other; Truth springing out of the earth, and Righteousness looking down from heaven *."

* Psal. lxviii. 15, 16.

Surely the God of Peace, who has displayed such "manifold wisdom" in restoring us to his favour by Christ Jesus, can be at no loss to reconcile his followers, and to terminate their minor differences, in such a way as shall be fully consistent with the claims of truth and holiness.

3. God will bring about this happy event under the administration of his Son, and by the influences of his Spirit.

"I will make them one nation; and David my servant shall be king over them, and they shall have one shepherd*." Christ is "the Prince of Peace;" and "having made peace by the blood of his cross," it is fit that he should have the honour, and he is qualified for the task, of terminating all the variances which may arise among those whom he has reconciled to God. As the High Priest of our profession, his prayer for them that have believed on him is, "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us;" and when at any time, in their present imperfect state, they kindle the anger of God against them by their discontents and seditions, "he stands," like Aaron with his golden censer, "between the dead and the living, and the plague is stayed †." As the King of the church he will confer this blessing on her. Though we do not yet see that "abundance of peace" which was predicted of his reign, we have the best grounds to believe, that, in the progress of his wise and righteous

* Ezek. xxxvii. 22, 24. † Num. xvi. 48.

and beneficent administration, the ecclesiastical feuds which have prevailed among his followers, and even the political wars which have raged among the nations, will gradually subside, and issue in a state of peace, concord, and amity, which, though not so perfect and uninterrupted as some have sanguinely anticipated, has hitherto been unexampled in the world. "He shall speak peace unto the heathen *." "He shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more †."

He will accomplish this chiefly by the influences of his Spirit, accompanying his word;—enlightening, regenerating, humanizing, purifying the hearts of men, and thus uniting them in love to himself, and subjection to his laws. The conversions, the revivals, the reformations, the unions, the enlargements of the church, are all ascribed in Scripture to this secret, irresistible, all-subduing agency. When God had begun to bestow on his people the blessings promised in our text and context, the prophet Zechariah was presented with the sight of a golden candlestick, having a bowl on its top, with seven lamps and seven pipes, and two olive trees which furnished the bowl with a constant supply of oil. And this is the explanation of the emblem, as given by the angelical interpreter who stood by

* Zech. ix. 10. † Mic. iv. 3. Isa. ii. 4.

it, "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts *." The "briars and thorns" of contention, and all the bitter fruits that have sprung from the old curse, will continue to "come up upon the land of God's people," "until the Spirit be poured upon us from on high †." When, at his ascension, Christ shed down the Holy Spirit, and "the appearance of cloven tongues, as of fire, sat on the disciples," the strangers who were collected heard each in his own language the wonderful works of God, and "the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul." Nor is it to be expected, my brethren, that we shall emerge from our confusions, worse than those which invaded mankind in the plain of Shinar, or that we shall regain primitive unanimity, until we are blessed with a new and liberal effusion of the influences of that Spirit who descended on the day of Pentecost.

In order to our becoming again "one body," we must be "all baptized by one Spirit, and all made to drink into one Spirit ‡." It is "the unity of the Spirit" that we are to "endeavour to keep in the bond of peace." Without his gracious aid we shall not be able to regain it when lost: our counsels will be foolish and carnal, and our endeavours feeble and abortive. Without this, it will want the essential characters of a scriptural and godly union. Ought it to be a union in the

* Zech. iv. 6. † Isa. xxxii. 13—15. ‡ 1 Cor. xii. 13.

truth? He is "the Spirit of truth," and it is his work to "lead unto all truth." Ought it to be holy? He is "the Spirit of holiness." In fine, it is he who produces and cherishes all those dispositions by which Christian union is cemented, and who counteracts all those principles which tend to its dissolution: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." "If we live in the Spirit," we shall "not be desirous of vainglory, provoking one another, envying one another *."

4 God prepares the way for union by reformation, and the revival of real religion. Abuses, and a course of corrupt administration, in a civil state, excite discontent and sedition, and sometimes lead to open rebellion and anarchy. The corruption of the word and ordinances of God is one great cause of divisions and offences in the church. The only way of effectually curing the evil is to remove the cause. Hence, the false prophets are severely reproved for "healing the hurt" of God's ancient people "slightly," and promising peace to them, while they remained impenitent and unreformed. When a wicked king asked, "Is it peace?" the only reply which he could obtain was, "What hast thou to do with peace? what peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel, and her witchcrafts are so many †!" If religious societies are in a corrupt or declining state, their conjunction could

* Gal. v. 22—26. † 2 Kings x. 19, 22.

only tend to aggravate their corruption and accelerate their decline.

When God intends to restore unity to his church, he begins with reforming her, and removing those evils which are offensive to himself, and to his faithful people. He gives commandment to " cast up, to prepare the way, to take up the stumbling-block out of the way of his people *." He, as " the Breaker, goes up before them." He enters his house, and his eyes, as a flame of fire, survey every apartment and every corner in it: he sees what is awanting and needs to be supplied and set in order, as well as what is superfluous and ought to be removed—all error, will-worship, prostitution of sacred things, tyranny, disorder. He ascends his judgment-seat, fences his great court of inquest and review, calls his servants before him, and institutes an inquiry into their conduct; reproving their mismanagement, reversing their unjust sentences, correcting every abuse, redressing every wrong, and deciding impartially and finally every quarrel and controversy that may have arisen among the members of his household. This judicial process is often very severe—to many it may prove ruinous and destructive; but to his church its issue is most beneficial and salutary. " Who may abide the day of his coming? or, who shall stand when he appeareth? He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he shall purify the sons of Levi, that they may offer a pure offering in righteous-

* Isa. lvii. 14. lxii. 10.

ness: Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old and as in former years*."

Examine those promises which hold forth the prospect of re-union to the church: you will find this in every instance associated with her reformation. Does God promise, "they shall all serve me with one consent?" This is the fruit of a previous promise, "I will turn to the people a PURE language." Does he say, "I will give them one heart?" He will do so, when "they shall take away all the detestable things and all the abominations from thence †." Does he say that "Israel shall be the third with Egypt and Assyria?" It is in the way of these two heathen nations being made to "speak the language of Canaan, and swear to the Lord of hosts;" that is, profess the true religion, and devote themselves to the service of God ‡. I ask your attention particularly to the predictions of the event immediately referred to in our text. The following declaration summarily announces the divine plan: "Thus saith the Lord, In the day that I shall have cleansed you from all your iniquities, I will also cause you to dwell in the cities, and the waste places shall be built ‖." How this purification shall be effected is declared in these words: "I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean;—a new heart also will I give you;—and I will put my Spirit within you §." The per-

* Mal. iii.. 2—4. † Ezek. xi. 18, 19. ‡ Isa. xix. 18, 21, 24.
‖ Ezek. xxxvi. 33. § vv. 25—27.

manent effects of this reformation are predicted in a verse subsequent to the text: "Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions; but I will save them out of all their dwelling-places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them; so shall they be my people, and I will be their God *." The process is described in different language, but of the same import, in a preceding part of the prophecy: "I will cause you to pass under the (tithing) rod +,

* ver. 23.

† This is, I believe, commonly understood of the rod of correction: I am inclined to think that the allusion is to the rod of the tithing master. (Lev. xxvii 32.) The following is, in my opinion, the meaning of the passage. The persons more immediately referred to are those Jews, who, before the final destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar, had fled and taken refuge in Phœnicia, and other countries bordering upon Judea, who flattered themselves that they should soon be able to return to their own land, though they still cherished their idolatrous inclinations, and who had sent their elders to Ezekiel to obtain, if possible, a response from God favourable to their wishes. (ver. 1. comp. chap. xiv. 1—4.) The prophet is directed to inform them that what "cometh into their mind shall not be at all"—that they shall be forced out of the countries where they now reside, and brought into "the wilderness of the people," (Chaldea), and there God will plead his controversy with them, as he had done with their fathers "in the wilderness of the land of Egypt," or into which they came after being brought out of Egypt. (ver. 33—36.) More particularly, he will "cause them to pass under the (tithing) rod," setting aside a tenth part of them for himself, and for this part he will "remember his covenant in the days of their youth, and establish unto them an everlasting covenant." (chap xvi. 60—63.) The nine parts he will treat as he had treated the bulk of the generation that came out of Egypt: he will "purge them out as rebels"—they shall not "enter into the land of Israel," but may "go serve every

and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant; and I will purge out from among you the rebels, and them that transgress against me—they shall not enter into the land of Israel." When this has been executed: "In mine holy mountain, in the mountain of the height of Israel, there shall all the house of Israel, ALL OF THEM in the land, serve me; there will I accept them *." It shall be as of old, "The tenth part shall be holy to the Lord." Sometimes, indeed, the process of refinement is not carried so far, and the residue is reduced only to a third. "It shall come to pass, that in all the land, saith the Lord, two parts therein shall be cut off and die; but the third shall be left therein. And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried; they shall call on my name, and I will hear them; I will say, It is my people; and they shall say, The Lord is my God †."

Run over the page of the church's history, and you will find the facts corresponding to the language of prophecy: her unions have been preceded by reformations. This was the case in the days of Hezekiah. That pious and reforming monarch not only removed the monuments of idolatry, but also "brake in pieces the brazen ser-

one his idols," where he chooses. (vv. 38, 39.) But the tenth part, which remains after "the rebels and transgressors have been purged out from among them," shall be restored to Judea, and "all of them in the land" shall serve God acceptably, and he will be "sanctified in them before the heathen." (ver. 40—44.)

* Ezek. xx. 35—40. † Zech. xiii. 8, 9.

pent that Moses had made," because "the children of Israel did burn incense to it *:" he opened the house of the Lord, and excited the priests and levites to sanctify it, to offer the burnt offering upon the altar, and to celebrate the praises of God, "according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and of Nathan the prophet." After this he sent "posts with letters through all Israel and Judah," inviting the people of both kingdoms to turn again to the Lord, enter into his sanctuary, and keep the solemn passover which he had indicted. The following is the account of his success: "Diverse of Asher and Manasseh, and of Zebulon, humbled themselves, and came to Jerusalem. Also in Judah, the hand of God was to give them one heart to do the commandment of the king and of the princes, by the word of the Lord. So there was great joy in Jerusalem; for since the time of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel, there was not the like in Jerusalem †."—This was the case also at the return from Babylon, when the schism between Judah and Israel was about to be completely cured. They were both cured of their disposition to idolatry; "the altar was set upon his bases;" the temple built "after the manner thereof;" and "whatsoever was commanded by the God of heaven diligently done for the house of the God of heaven ‡."—It was at a period emphatically called "the time of reformation," that Jew and Greek, Barbarian and Scythian,

* 2 Kings xviii. 4. † 2 Chron. xxx. 11, 12, 26. ‡ Ezra, *passim*.

bond and free, were made one, after the labours of the greatest of all Reformers as well as Peace-makers, and of his Forerunner, of whom it was said, "Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God; and he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord *." —Subsequently there have been times of reformation in the Church, and especially in our land, which were accompanied by a happy and uncommon spirit of unanimity and conjunction among the friends of religion. And to those measures which once and again put a premature stop to the progress of religious reform in England, and which at one time overturned, and afterwards defaced and marred, a more perfect reformation attained in Scotland, must we principally attribute those ecclesiastical divisions and feuds which have arisen at different periods, and still prevail in both countries.

The ways and thoughts of the Almighty are very different from ours. We seek great things: He seeks those which are good. We look on the outward appearance of a cause or a measure: He looks into the heart of it. We "despise the day of small things," and nothing will satisfy us but an attempt upon a great scale: He, on the contrary, delights in a work which is in its "beginning small;" in its progress, gradual, noise-

* Luke i. 16, 17.

less, and often imperceptible; but in "its latter end doth greatly increase." We would unite large masses, and afterwards set about reforming them: His plan is the reverse. "Turn, O backsliding children, and I will take you one of a city and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion; and I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding. And it shall come to pass when ye be multiplied and increased in the land—they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord, and all nations shall be gathered unto it to the name of the Lord *."

5. God sometimes facilitates and prepares the way for union by removing the occasions of offence and division. In righteous judgment he permits stumbling-blocks to fall in the way of professors of religion, which he afterwards mercifully removes. As long as the two kingdoms of Judah and Israel subsisted they were rivals, and policy concurred with a passion for idolatry in keeping up their religious dissensions. In overturning the kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians, he whose views are not limited to the accomplishment of a single end, intended not only to punish that people for their defection from his worship, but also to prepare the way for their coalescing with Judah into one holy society. "Yet a little while (says he) and I will cause to cease the kingdom of the house of Israel. Then shall the children of Judah and the children of Israel

* Jer. iii. 14, 17.

be gathered together, and appoint themselves one head, and they shall come up out of the land*." Even the kingdom of Judah behoved to be dissolved, that every obstruction might be removed out of the way; and that "the glory of the house of David and the glory of the inhabitants of Jerusalem might not magnify themselves" over their brethren. A long and violent quarrel had subsisted between the Jews and Samaritans, which turned chiefly on the question, Whether Jerusalem or Mount Gerizzim was the divinely appointed place of sacred service. The Jews were in the right on the merits of this question, though they allowed their zeal to carry them to a vicious extreme, in not only refusing to symbolize with a corrupt worship, but in also declining to have any civil or friendly dealings with the Samaritans. This was our Saviour's judgment; and yet he intimated to the woman of Samaria, that God was about to put an end to the dispute in a way which neither of the contending parties looked for. "Woman, believe me; the hour cometh when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father. Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship; for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers of the Father shall worship him in spirit and in truth †." It pleased God who "made peace by the blood of the cross," at the same time to reconcile Jews and Gentiles, and to abolish

* Hos. i. 4, 11. † Jo. iv. 21—23.

the ceremonial law which was a wall of partition between them, that they might become one holy family. Though the virtual abrogation of this law by the death of Christ set the consciences of Christians free from its observance, their union was not yet complete; the temporary regulations made by divine direction for preserving communion between Jews and Gentiles, though they allayed, did not put an end to all offences and divisions arising from this quarter; and therefore God provided for the consolidation of the union by destroying the temple, and thus rendering the peculiar service connected with it physically impossible.

Instances of the same kind, or at least analogous, might be pointed out in the subsequent history of the church. Dissentions, which had arisen among the early Christians during the severe and numerous persecutions which they suffered, were terminated on the overthrow of Pagan Rome. The law known by the name of the *Interim*, enacted in Germany soon after the Reformation, was not only the cause of much suffering, but also of violent disputes and great disunion among Protestants; while some of them pleaded the lawfulness of complying with its regulations, and others, more firm and consistent, condemned this as a sinful conformity. Of the same kind, during the last and sorest persecution in this country, were the disputes among Presbyterians, excited by the various ensnaring oaths and tests imposed by government, and the indulgences and tolerations which flowed from an Erastian supre-

macy, were clogged with sinful conditions, and intended to pave the way for the establishment of popery and arbitrary power. All of these were abolished at the Revolution. I do not mean to say, that the simple abolition of these or similar impositions will in itself heal the divisions which they had occasioned, or, that it is a sufficient or proper reason for the immediate restoration of interrupted communion and harmony. As no external circumstance ought to mar the unity and peace of the Church, nor can it have this effect without the intervention of human imperfection and sin, so no change of external circumstances can restore what was lost without the co-operation of the grace of God, inclining the hearts of the parties to their duty and to one another. All that is meant is, that this is one of the means which providence is sometimes pleased to employ and bless; and that by removing temptations on the one hand, and occasions of offence on the other, it has a tendency to facilitate arrangements for peace, in which a regard to faithfulness and the public interests of religion is combined with a due respect to the convictions of brethren, and an enlightened consideration of the circumstances in which they may have been placed. I cannot help viewing the present non-imposition of that oath which at first occasioned a breach in the Secession body, as a dispensation of this kind, and which admits of being improved in the way just mentioned; provided the parties concerned were cordially attached to the common cause espoused by their fathers, and at one

as to the great ends and objects of their original association.

6. God prepares the way for union in his Church by causing the divided parties to participate of the same afflictions and deliverances. Having described the judgments inflicted on the kingdom of the ten tribes, God says to Judah: "Thou shall drink of thy sister's cup, deep and large, thou shalt be filled with drunkenness and sorrow, with the cup of thy sister Samaria *." Both the punishment and the deliverance of Israel and Judah are often spoken of by the prophets as one; and as intended equally for their reformation and reunion. "By this, therefore, shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged, and this is all the fruit, to take away sin. And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall beat along† the channel of the river unto the stream of Egypt; and ye shall be gathered one by one, O ye children of Israel ‡."

Providence blesses their communion in suffering to fit them for communion in love and holy living. How can fellow-sufferers but have a fellow-feeling for one another§? Having drunk of the same cup of suffering, must they not desire to drink of the same cup of blessing and thanksgiving?

* Exek. xxiii. 32.

† A metaphor borrowed from the practice of hunters who beat the bushes along the banks of rivers to rouse and dislodge the wild beasts which took refuge there. Hence the phrase, *Excutere cubilibus feras.*

‡ Isa. xxvii. 9, 12. See also Jer. l, 17—20, 33.

§ 2 Cor. i. 7. 1 Thess. ii. 14.

The process by which they are refined also prepares them for uniting, by consuming or separating the dross and tin and clay of corruption, which kept them asunder. " Put many pieces of metal together into the furnace, and when they are melted, they will run together," says a pious writer*. When the Hebrews in Egypt smote and strove with one another, and spurned the mediatory offices of Moses, who " would have set them at one again," it was a proof that the time of their deliverance was not yet come, and that they needed to be kept longer in the iron furnace. It was when the sons of Jacob were suspected as spies in Egypt, and harshly treated, and thrown into prison, that they remembered their treatment of Joseph with whom they had dealt cruelly as a spy on their conduct, and feelingly expressed their compunction in the presence of their offended, but forgiving and tender-hearted, brother. Bishops Hooper and Ridley had a warm contest in the reign of Edward VI. but when, in the time of the bloody Mary, they were thrown into the same prison, and had the prospect of being brought to the same stake, they lovingly embraced, and Ridley readily professed his contempt for that ceremony which, with intolerant eagerness, he had imposed on his reluctant brother. The affair of the Public Resolutions, during the second reformation in Scotland, caused a very hurtful schism in the presbyterian church, and those who protested against the measure had church censures in-

* Henry on Ezekiel xxxvii. 21.

flicted on them by the ruling majority; but after the Restoration, when the religion and liberties of the nation were overturned, and the arm of persecution was stretched out against both parties, some of the leading promoters of the Resolutions had their eyes opened, and candidly confessed that their protesting brethren had acted a wiser, and more upright part than themselves. A confession honourable to faithfulness, and a thousand times more creditable to the persons who made it, than if they had stood stiffly to the defence of their conduct after the event had shewn its faultiness, or if, covering self-love with the cloak of forbearance, they had insisted on consigning the affair to silence and oblivion.

When God grants a common deliverance to those who were exposed to similar sufferings and dangers, he throws around their hearts "the cords of love," and draws them together as with "the bands of a man." The powers of hell and earth combined could not have severed the three young captives, after they came up from the burning fiery furnace, linked together in chains of a very different kind from those which the flames had recently consumed. "Lovely and pleasant in their lives," what a spectacle must they have afforded, "in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation among whom they walked as lights!" In the field of modern church history, I do not know a spot on which the mind rests with a more pleasing emotion, than that which describes the deputation sent by the Waldenses of Bohemia to congratulate and establish concord with the first re-

formers of Germany and Swisserland; the candour with which that interesting and simple body of Chrisian confessors stated the faith and religious practice which they had so long retained and held fast in the jaws of persecution; and the ingenuous and meek spirit with which they received the advice and admonitions of their more enlightened brethren. The Harmony of Confessions in the protestant churches, and their mutual correspondence and co-operation, evince the unanimity and good will by which they were actuated at the era of the Reformation from Popery. It is true that a dispute early arose between some of the leading reformers, which was managed with unbecoming violence and obstinacy by at least one of the parties; but it was confined to a single article, and did not lead to an irreparable breach, until after their death, when there had arisen a generation which knew not the mighty works which the Lord had done in rescuing their fathers from Antichristian darkness and bondage. I need not dwell on the effect which emancipation from a popish and hierarchical yoke had, at different periods, in uniting the friends of religion and reformation in our native land, and in exciting them to seek the extension of this "blessed union and conjunction" to other Christian Churches. It were presumptuous to limit divine sovereignty, or to prescribe an invariable mode of action to the Almighty and All-wise; but, brethren, as often as I reflect on these things, and survey the present state of the church of Christ, the thought still recurs forcibly to my mind, Surely we

must be made to pass through some fiery trial, before we shall be refined from those corruptions which have defaced the beauty and eaten out the power of religion, and before we shall be fitted for becoming "one in the hand of the Lord."

Lastly, In healing the divisions of the church God has cemented and consecrated the parties by disposing them to give the most solemn pledges of their fidelity to himself, and to one another. It was predicted that the return from the captivity and the conjunction of Judah and Israel should be distinguished by such exercises. "In those days, and at that time, saith the Lord, the children of Israel shall come, they and the children of Judah together, going and weeping: they shall go, and seek the Lord their God. They shall ask the way to Zion with their faces thitherward, saying, Come, and let us join ourselves to the Lord in a perpetual covenant that shall not be forgotten *." How exactly the event corresponded to the prophecy, you may see by consulting the books of Ezra and Nehemiah.

Public vows and religious covenants formed no part of Jewish peculiarity. They did not belong to the ceremonial law; and it would be something worse than an absurdity to describe them as oaths of allegiance to Jehovah, as the political head of the nation of Israel. They are not more unsuitable to the character of the Christian church than they were to that of the Jewish. Ac-

* Jer. l. 4, 5.

cordingly, it is expressly foretold in many prophecies, that such solemn exercises shall take place in New Testament times *. These predictions have been verified and fulfilled at different periods and in different countries. And in none have they been more eminently fulfilled than in our own land, especially in times of reformation and union. When peace has been restored between contending nations, it is common for them to renew their former compacts of amity, and to repeat the solemnities by which they were originally ratified. What more seasonable for those who have long been divided by their own sins and the divine anger, than to humble themselves before God, and to ask of him a right way? And what more fitted for expressing their gratitude and cementing their union, than a joint dedication of themselves to God, accompanied with solemn pledges of mutual fidelity?

I shall now state some inferences from the doctrine that has been laid down.

1. You may see from this subject the extensive and permanent utility of Old Testament Scripture. Not only was it "given by inspiration of God," but it still "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness †." Its utility is not limited to those parts which contain prophecies relating to the New Testament, or which afford us instruction by means of types and figures. It abounds with direct information

* Isa. xix. 18, 21. xliv. 3—5. xlv. 23. Jer. iv. 2. Zech. ii. 11. xiii. 9. † 2 Tim. iii. 16.

respecting the great truths of religion, the worship of God, and the exercises and experiences, the conflicts and comforts of a holy and godly life. It conveys important instruction concerning the divine dispensations to individuals, nations, and the church; and concerning the duties which men owe to God and to one another, in their individual or collective capacity, and in their different stations and relations, natural, civil, or ecclesiastical. The permanent authority and usefulness of the Scriptures of the Old Testament rest on such principles as these: that the author of both great divisions of the Bible is one and the same; that he has in all ages governed the world of mankind by moral laws, as well as ruled over a peculiar people; and that true religion, and the church of God professing it, have ever been substantially the same under subordinate varieties of external dispensation. Even those parts of the inspired record which refer to the Jewish, admit of an application to the Christian economy, in the way of *analogy*—by setting aside whatever was peculiar to the former, and seizing on the points of agreement or resemblance between the two economies, and on those principles and grounds which are common to both. This is a key to the Old Testament which appears to be much neglected, and whose value has not been sufficiently appreciated: although our Saviour and his apostles have set us examples of its use and importance *.

* Matt. xii. 3—8. 1 Cor. ix. 8—14. x. 1—11. 17—22. James v. 16—18; with many other places.

Erroneous, mistaken, or defective notions on this subject are very injurious to the unity and peace of the Church. They are common in the present time; have given rise to "diverse and strange doctrines," and an endless variety of novel opinions; have produced distorted and partial views of morality; have sapped the foundation, and impaired the evidence of many religious institutions; and, under the name of Christianity, have led to the adoption of a faith and practice not only different from, but, in its genius and spirit, opposite to that religion which God revealed from the beginning, and which was professed and followed by the fearers of his name for four thousand years. Many who maintain the divine origin and inspiration of this part of the sacred volume, shew a disposition unduly to abridge that authority which they acknowledge in general, while they resist, as impertinent and inconclusive, every argument brought from it, unless it is supported and confirmed by the writings of the New Testament. The principles, communion, and practice of Christians must necessarily be defective and wrong, when they are formed and regulated, not by the whole, but a part only of the perfect and divinely authorized standard. How can it be expected that parties will come to one, if they are not agreed on what constitutes the supreme judge of all their controversies, and the infallible canon by which they are bound to walk together?

2. We may hence see what constitutes the evil of schism, and wherein this differs from war-

rantable separation. Though all parties nearly agree in the general notion of schism, yet, when they come to explain and apply it, they are found to differ very widely in their opinions. Few subjects have been involved in greater obscurity, and have given occasion to such opposite charges and severe recriminations. Some, both in ancient and modern times, have described it in the most exaggerated colours, and represented it as the most heinous of all sins. Papists have grossly perverted the meaning of the word, and made it, along with heresy, a constant topic of declamation and unjust reproach against all who have left their communion; and in this part of their conduct they have been followed by the warm admirers, and undiscriminating advocates of some national churches among protestants *. Others have erred on the opposite extreme, have extenuated its evil, and narrowed the Scripture meaning of the term, by confining it to one kind or branch of it, and excluding or overlooking all others. The original word in the New Testament translated schism or division, signifies any rent or breach, by which that which was formerly one is divided; and when applied to the church, it is always used in a bad sense. Chris-

* In their declamations against schism, such expressions as the following have been used by Protestant writers (let them be nameless): "An offence so grievous that nothing so much incenses God:—No reformation can be so important as the sin of schism is pernicious:—No multitude of good works, no moral honesty of life, no cruel death, endured even for the faith, can excuse any who are guilty of it from damnation."

tians are reprehended for giving way to schism, and exhorted to avoid those who cause it. It is a relative term, and cannot be understood without just views of that unity and communion of which it is a violation.

Schism does not consist, as some have preposterously maintained, in separation from the church considered as invisible. It is not to be restricted to separation from the catholic body, or whole community of Christians; as if none could be justly chargeable with this sin, for withdrawing from the communion of particular churches. It is often displayed in fomenting factions within a church, and accompanied with an uncharitable, bitter, or turbulent spirit; but there is no good reason for confining it to one or both of these; and neither the proper meaning of the word nor the scriptural use of it, supports the favourite opinion of some modern critics and divines, that 'no person, who, in the spirit of candour and charity, adheres to that which, to the best of his judgment is right, though in his opinion he should be mistaken, is, in the scriptural sense, either schismatic or heretic *.' Dishonesty and uncharitableness are not essential qualities either of heresy or schism, but aggravations which are sometimes found cleaving to them.

* Dr Campbell's Dissertation on Heresy and Schism; prefixed to his New Translation of the Gospels. Some of the positions in that dissertation, indefensible, in my opinion, on the principles either of sound criticism or sound divinity, have been admitted with surprising facility in this country.

On the other hand, schism and separation are not convertible terms, nor are the things signified by them necessarily of the same kind. Schism is always evil; separation may be either good or evil, according to circumstances. To constitute the former, there must be a violation of some of the scriptural bonds of unity in the body of Christ. It presupposes a church formed and constituted by the authority and according to the laws of Christ, and an administration corresponding to the nature, character, and design of such a society, at least so far as that persons may belong to it without sin, and hold communion with it consistently with that regard which they owe to their spiritual safety and edification. The Christian church is not an arbitrary institution of men—not a mere voluntary association of any number of people, for any purpose, and on any terms, which to them may seem good; nor has its communion been left vague and undetermined by the laws of its founder. It is not schism to refuse submission to human constitutions, though they may be called churches, and may have religion some way for their object, nor to refuse conformity to such terms as men may be pleased to impose without warrant from the word of God; whether these constitutions and terms proceed from the lust of power, or from the pride of wisdom, and whether they be intended to forward the policy of statesmen, to feed the ambition of churchmen, or to flatter the humours of the populace.

That churches, once pure and faithful, may degenerate so far, and fall into such a state as will

warrant separation from them, is evident from the injunctions and examples of Scripture, and from facts compared with the nature and ends of religious fellowship. Nor can this be denied by any consistent protestant. To "cleave to the Lord," to cultivate fellowship with him in the way he has prescribed, and to "follow him whithersoever he goeth," constitute the primary object to be kept in view by Christians: to this, fellowship with men is secondary and subordinate; and we are bound to forego and relinquish the latter, whenever it is found incompatible with the former. We are exhorted to "follow peace with all men," not absolutely, but so far only as it is consistent with "holiness," and may be lawfully practicable. No particular church has any promise securing her continuance in the faith and in purity of communion; and, consequently, none can have a right to claim a perpetual or inviolable union with her, or to denounce persons schismatics simply on the ground of their withdrawing from her pale and declining her authority.

Separation may be either negative or positive. A negative separation consists in withdrawing from wonted communion with a church, either in the way of not participating with her in some ordinances, on the ground of corruptions attaching to them, or in the way of suspending all public communion with her. A positive separation consists in the formation of another church, and the holding of other assemblies, in contradistinction from those with which we were formerly connected. In all ordinary cases the former ought

to precede the latter; as it is our duty to try every means for removing evils before adopting the last resource. But when the prospect of recovering our Christian privileges, consistently with our duty to God, may be distant and doubtful, when many may be placed in the same situation with ourselves, and when the public interests of religion are involved in the matter of our grievances, the same reasons which warranted a negative separation will, by their continuance, warrant that which is positive; for none are at liberty to live without public ordinances when they have access to enjoy them. I need scarcely add, that if in providence we can find a church already constituted to which we can conscientiously accede, regard to the communion of saints, and aversion to unnecessary division, ought to induce us to prefer this course to the formation of a new society.

I do not mean to determine the delicate question, how far or how long communion may be maintained with corrupt churches, nor to state the causes which may render separation from them lawful and necessary. The decision of such questions must always depend much on the state of particular facts and actual circumstances occurring at the time. Some general points are almost universally conceded, such as, that it is warrantable to separate from a church which obstinately maintains gross and destructive errors, or is chargeable with idolatry, or adulterates the ordinances of Christ, or exercises a tyrannical authority over the souls of men, or has established

sinful terms of communion, or whose fellowship we cannot enjoy without being involved in sin, and living in the neglect of some necessary duty. When a church once reformed and faithful not only departs from what she had professed and received, and persists in this by a series of public acts, but also restrains all due freedom in testifying against her defection; or when she adopts doctrines inconsistent with her former scriptural profession and engagements, and imposes these by the perverted exercise of authority and discipline,—separation from her communion is lawful. When the public profession and administrations of a church have been settled conformably to the laws of Christ, and sanctioned by the most solemn engagements, if the majority shall set these aside, and erect a new constitution sinfully defective, and involving a material renunciation of the former, the minority refusing to accede to this, adhering to their engagements, and continuing to maintain communion on the original terms, cannot justly be charged with schism.

But while the lawfulness and duty of separation in certain cases is to be asserted and vindicated, we must not overlook the evil of schism, nor forget to warn you against unwarrantable or rash separations. It cannot admit of a doubt, that in the present time there is a strong tendency in the minds of many to run to this extreme; and to this they are inclined in no small degree by the incorrect and loose notions which they entertain on the subject. Many can assign no

grounds for their leaving the communion of a church which will stand the test of Scripture or reason. They are actuated by mere arbitrary will or obstinate humour, by selfishness or unsociability of disposition, by capriciousness or levity of spirit, and by dislikes which they cannot explain to others and perhaps cannot account for to themselves. Others are influenced by indifference to the benefit of religious fellowship, weariness of the offices and duties connected with it, love of carnal liberty, aversion to some of the doctrines or institutions of Christ, and impatience of faithful admonitions and the due exercise of church discipline. Others, who shew a regard for divine ordinances, and profess a concern to preserve their purity, may relinquish the fellowship of a church from personal offences and grudges, from pride, envy, or disappointed ambition, or on account of debates and differences which have no immediate relation to the terms of ecclesiastical communion. A church which has received the doctrines of Christ, and in which the office-bearers and ordinances instituted by him, and all the privileges conducive to salvation may be enjoyed, may nevertheless be chargeable with various defects and evils. I think myself warranted by Scripture, and supported by the sentiments of the soundest divines who have treated this subject, when I state, that separation from such a church cannot be vindicated when it proceeds on such grounds as the following: Personal offences given by the misconduct of individual church members: Wrong decisions in personal causes or particular acts of maladministration,

when they are not of lasting injury to the whole body: Differences of opinion among the members of a church about matters that cannot be shewn to be positively determined in the word of God, and have not been received into the public profession of that church: Diversity of practice in some points of mere external order, or in prudential regulations as to the form of divine worship: The venting of errors by particular teachers, while the instances of this are infrequent, and not openly countenanced by authority in the church, and the relaxation of discipline by admitting improper persons into communion in particular cases, or by not duly censuring those who are guilty of scandals; provided the ordinances themselves are retained in purity, the rules of discipline are not set aside, and there is access to have grievances on this head heard and redressed in due time: In fine, irregularities or abuses of different kinds in a church which is panting after reformation, endeavouring to free herself from restraints and hindrances that prevent her attaining it, and disposed to allow the use of those means which tend to further this desirable object.

3. We may hence see ground for lamentation on account of the dissensions and divisions which at present abound in the Church of Christ. When, of old, one tribe in Israel was divided from the rest, or was prevented by intestine dissensions from "coming to the help of the Lord against the mighty," it was matter of deep distress, and bitter regret to every lover of religion and the public welfare. "For the divi-

sions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart:—for the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart *." And, surely, we ought to be affected in the same way in contemplating the dissensions of the Christian commonwealth, and of the particular provinces and sections of which it is composed. It is true, that, in the complex and extensive arrangements of divine providence, they are necessary; and they will be over-ruled for the production of ultimate and superabundant good. But this does not prove that they are not evil in themselves, nor that they may not be productive of manifold and great evils during a long series of years. It is also true, that they have prevailed in every age, and that the Church was not altogether free from them when she appeared in virgin purity and with angelical power on her head. The presence of inspired apostles and the possession of miraculous gifts did not prevent division; nay, these gifts became the occasions of fomenting the evil, and by their abuse the members of the church were "puffed up one against another." But at no former period, and in no other country, has division prevailed to such an extent, as it does at present in our own land, which exhibits a countless variety of religious persuasions, and groans under endless divisions and subdivisions of parties. We have societies maintaining contradictory sentiments on almost every article of faith that can be named, and pursuing opposite practices

* Judg. v. 15, 16.

respecting every institution of religion and every form of its celebration. Nor are the members of these societies in many instances more united among themselves than the different parties are with one another. Every one hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Such a wanton use have we made of our liberty as to have almost brought the very name into disgrace, and to tempt men to think that there is no certainty in religion. Scotland was long distinguished for her religious unity, as well as purity. But, alas! it is to be lamented, that, in both respects, there is reason for saying, "The glory is departed!" First the staff of Beauty, and afterwards that of Bands, has been broken in our land. We are now as much disunited as our neighbours; sects have multiplied among us; and those who were most firmly united, and under the highest obligations to abide by a common profession, once solemnly embraced by the whole nation, have been divided and sore broken in judgment.

Whether we consider the causes or the consequences of our divisions, they call loudly for mourning. What reason have we to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, whose displeasure they so strongly indicate! To inquire, "What meaneth the heat of this great anger?" To smite on our breast and say, each for himself, "What have I done" to kindle or to keep alive the flame? What a humiliating spectacle of human weakness and depravity! To see Religion, which is calculated to unite men together "even

as with a band of iron and brass," and Christianity, which breathes nothing but "peace and goodwill," and the Bible, expressly given by God as a common rule of faith and manners, become the occasion of so much division and discord and strife in the world! What matter of triumph to the infidel and the idolater! What cause of stumbling and offence to the weak and doubting Christian! How much has it contributed to mar the influence of the gospel at home, and to obstruct the propagation of it abroad, or to weaken the efforts that are made for this purpose! But I refrain from a theme which has been copiously treated by many pious and eloquent writers.

Some, perhaps, may see no reason for such deplorations. They rejoice in the mitigation of that spirit of keenness and asperity with which religious disputes were formerly carried on; and anticipate the happiest results from the associations which have lately been formed among Christians of almost all denominations. But a little consideration may serve to lower the exultation which these facts are calculated at first view to raise. The general object of some of these societies, and the distant field of exertion chosen by others, remind us of our existing differences. Under the combinations, too, which have been forming, a process of decomposition has been secretly going on in the minds of Christians, by which their attachment to various articles of the faith has been loosened. A vague and indefinite evangelism, mixed with seriousness, into which it is the prevailing disposition of the present age to

resolve all Christianity, will, in the natural progress of human sentiment, degenerate into an unsubstantial and incoherent pietism, which, after effervescing in enthusiasm, will finally settle into indifference; in which case, the spirit of infidelity and irreligion, which is at present working and spreading to a more alarming extent than many seem to imagine, will achieve an easy conquest over a feeble and exhausted and nerveless adversary. "When the Son of Man cometh, shall he find faith in the earth?" Let wise men judge whether these forebodings are fanciful.

4. The danger of latitudinarian schemes of union and fellowship. Mournful as the divisions of the church are, and anxious as all its genuine friends must be to see them cured, it is their duty to examine carefully the plans which may be proposed for attaining this desirable end. We must not do evil that good may come; and there are sacrifices too costly to be made for the procuring of peace with fellow-christians. Is it necessary to remind you, that unity and peace are not always good, nor a sure and infallible mark of a true and pure church? We know that there is a church which has long boasted of her catholic unity notwithstanding all the corruptions which pollute her communion; and that within her pale the whole world called Christian once enjoyed a profound repose, and it could be said, "Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language." It was a union and peace founded in ignorance, delusion, implicit faith, and a base subjection to human authority; and supported

by the arts of compulsion and terror. But there are other methods by which Christians may be deceived, and the interests of religion deeply injured, under the pretext or with the view of uniting its friends. Among these I know none more imposing, nor from which greater danger is to be apprehended in the present time, than that which proceeds on the scheme of principles usually styled latitudinarian.

It has obtained this name because it proclaims an undue latitude in matters of religion, which persons may take to themselves or give to others. Its abettors make light of the differences which subsist among religious parties, and propose to unite them on the common principles on which they are already agreed, in the way of burying the rest in silence, or of stipulating mutual forbearance and charity with respect to every thing about which they may differ in opinion or in practice. Some plead for this on the ground that the several professions of religion differ very little from one another, and are all conducive to the happiness of mankind and the honour of God, who is pleased with the various and diversified modes in which men profess their regard to him, provided only they are sincere in their professions; a principle of difformity, which, however congenial to the system of polytheism, is utterly eversive of a religion founded on the unity of the divine nature and will, and on a revelation which teaches us what we are to believe concerning God and what duty he requires of us. But the ground on which this plan is ordi-

narily made to rest is a distinction made among the articles of religion. Some of these are called essential, or fundamental, or necessary, or principal; others circumstantial, or non-fundamental, or unnecessary, or less important. The former, it is pleaded, are embraced by all true Christians; the latter form the subjects of difference among them, and ought not to enter into the terms of ecclesiastical fellowship *. On this principle some of them would conciliate and unite all the Christian denominations, not excepting Papists, Arians, and Socinians; while others restrict their plan to those called evangelical, who differ mainly in their views and practice as to the worship, order, and discipline of the Church.

The distinction on which this scheme rests, is itself liable to objections which appear insuperable. It is not warranted by the word of God; and the most acute of its defenders have never been able to state it in a manner that is satisfactory, or which renders it subservient to any practical use. The Scripture, indeed, speaks of certain truths which may be called the foundation, because they are first laid, and others depend on them—first principles, or elementary truths, which are to be taught before others. But their

* The distinction is variously expressed. Some modern writers on the subject of communion adhere to the distinction between what is essential, or not essential to salvation. Others, aware of what has been urged against it, chuse to substitute the word fundamental in the room of essential; and, for security's sake, they would add a few other articles to the fundamental. But what the one or the other are they do not tell.

priority or posteriority in point of order, in conception or instruction, does not determine the relative importance of doctrines, or their necessity in order to salvation, far less does it determine the propriety of their being made to enter into the religious profession of Christians and Christian churches.—There are doctrines, too, which intrinsically, and on different accounts, may be said to have a peculiar and superior degree of importance; and this, so far as known, may properly be urged as a motive for our giving the more earnest heed to them. It is not, however, their comparative importance or utility, but their truth and the authority of him who has revealed them, which is the formal and proper reason of our receiving, professing, and maintaining them. And this applies equally to all the contents of a divine revelation. The relations of truths, especially those of a supernatural kind, are manifold and incomprehensible by us; it is not our part to pronounce a judgment on them; and if we could see them, as God does, in all their extent and at once, we would behold the lesser joined to the greater, the most remote connected with the primary, by necessary and indissoluble links, and all together conspiring to form one beautiful and harmonious and indivisible whole. Whatever God has revealed we are bound to receive and hold fast, whatever he has enjoined we are bound to obey; and the liberty which we dare not arrogate to ourselves we cannot give to others. It is not, indeed, necessary that the confession or testimony of the church (meaning by this that which is

explicitly made by her, as distinguished from her declared adherence to the whole word of God) should contain all truths; but then any of them may come to be included in it, when opposed and endangered; and it is no sufficient reason for excluding any of them that they are less important than others, or that they have been doubted and denied by good and learned men. Whatever forbearance may be exercised to persons, "the word of the Lord," in all its extent, "must have free course and be glorified;" and any act of men—call it forbearance or what you will—which serves as a screen and protection to error or sin, and prevents it from being opposed and removed by any proper means, is contrary to the divine law, and consequently is destitute of all intrinsic force and validity.—There are truths also which are more immediately connected with salvation. But who will pretend to fix those propositions which are absolutely necessary to be known, in order to salvation—by all persons—of all capacities—and in all situations; or say how low a God of grace and salvation may descend in dealing with particular individuals? Or, if we could determine this extreme point, who would say that it ought to fix the rule of our dealing with others, or the extent of a church's profession of faith? Is nothing else to be kept in view in settling articles of faith and fellowship, but what may be necessary to the salvation of sinners? Do we not owe a paramount regard to the glory of God in the highest, to the edifying of the body of Christ, to the advancing of the general interests of religion,

and to the preserving, in purity, of those external means, by which, in the economy of providence and grace, the salvation of men, both initial and progressive, may be promoted to an incalculable extent from age to age?—In fine, there is reason for complaining that the criteria or marks given for determining these fundamental or necessary articles, are uncertain or contradictory. Is it alleged, that they are clearly taught in Scripture? This is true of others also. 'That they are few and simple?' This is contradicted by their own attempts to state them. 'That they are such as the Scripture has declared to be necessary?' Why then have we not yet been furnished with a catalogue of them? 'That they are such as are embraced by all true Christians?' Have they a secret tact by which they are able to discover such characters? If not, can they avoid running into a vitious circle in reasoning, by first determining who are true Christians by their embracing certain doctrines, and then determining that these doctrines are fundamental because they are embraced by persons of that description?

Many who have contributed to give currency to this scheme have been actuated, I have no doubt, by motives which are in themselves highly commendable. They wished to fix the attention of men on matters confessedly of great importance, and were anxious to put an end to the dissensions of Christians by discovering a mean point in which the views of all might harmoniously meet. But surely those who cherish

a supreme regard for divine authority will be afraid of contemning or of teaching others to think lightly of any thing which bears its sacred impress. They will be disposed carefully to reconsider an opinion, or an interpretation of any part of Scripture, which seems to imply in it, that God has given to men a power to dispense with some of his own laws. And they will be cautious of originating or countenancing plans of communion that may involve a principle of such a complexion. These plans are more or less dangerous according to the extent to which they are carried, and the errors or abuses which may prevail among the parties which they embrace. But however limited they may be, they set an example which may be carried to any extent. So far as it is agreed and stipulated, that any truth or duty shall be sacrificed or neglected, and that any error or sin shall be treated as indifferent or trivial, the essence of latitudinarianism is adopted, room is made for further advancements, and the way is prepared for ascending, through successive gradations, to the very highest degree in the scale.

Another plan of communion, apparently opposite to the former, but proceeding on the same general principle, has been zealously recommended, and in some instances reduced to practice, in the present day. According to it, the several religious parties are allowed to remain separate, and to preserve their distinct constitution and peculiarities, while a species of partial or occasional communion is established among them.

This plan is liable to all the objections which lie against the former, with the addition of another that is peculiar to itself. It is inconsistent and self-contradictory. It strikes against the radical principles of the unity of the Church, and confirms schism by a law; while it provides that the parties shall remain separate, at the same time that it proceeds on the supposition that there is no scriptural or conscientious ground of difference between them. By defending such occasional conformity, English Dissenters at a former period contradicted the reasons of their dissent from the establishment, and exposed themselves to their opponents: for where communion is lawful, it will not be easy to vindicate separation from the charge of schism. The world has for some time beheld annually the spectacle of Episcopalians, Presbyterians, Independents, Methodists, and Seceders, sitting down together at the Lord's table, and then going away and maintaining communion, through the remainder of the year, on their own separate and contradictory professions. Nay, it has of late become the practice to keep, in the same church, an open communion-table for Christians of different denominations on one part of the day, and a close one for those of a particular sect on the other part of the day; while the same minister officiates, and many individuals communicate, on both these occasions. And all this is cried up as a proof of liberality, and a mind that has freed itself from the trammels of party * !

* In America, "A plan of Brotherly Correspondence" has re-

It is difficult to say which of these plans is most objectionable. By the former, that church which is most faithful, and has made the greatest progress in reformation, must always be the loser, without having the satisfaction to think that she has conveyed any benefit to her new associates. it behoves her profession and managements to yield, and be reduced to the standard of those societies which are defective and less reformed; and thus, by a process opposite to that mentioned by the apostle, those who have built on the found-

cently been agreed to, between the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, and the General Synod of the Associate Reformed Church. The first article of agreement is "The Churches are to remain entirely separate and independent." By the remaining articles it is provided, that members of either church may be admitted to communion with the other: and that the officers in any congregation of either church, may invite to their pulpit any Minister or Probationer in the other, "who preaches in their purity the great doctrines of the gospel, as they are stated in the common Confession of Faith, and have generally been received and taught in the Reformed Churches." Those under censure in the one church are not to be received into the other. The members of Presbyteries and Synods of one of the churches may be invited to sit as corresponding members of the same judicatories of the other; but if not invited they must not be offended. And a minister or elder from each of the supreme judicatories shall sit in the other, but without a vote.

Though I consider this plan as obnoxious to the censures in the text, I would not be understood as condemning all intercourse or correspondence between separate churches. On the contrary, I think that in some instances it may be of great utility, for paving the way for the removing of subsisting differences, and preventing or remedying offences, hurtful to the general interests of religion, which may arise from the managements of either party; such as, the receiving into communion of those who have fled from discipline in the other.

ation " gold, silver, precious stones," are the persons who shall " suffer loss." By the latter, all the good effects which might be expected from warrantable and necessary separations are lost, without the compensation of a rational and effective conjunction; purity of communion is endangered; persons are encouraged to continue in connection with the most corrupt churches; and a faithful testimony against errors and abuses, with all consistent attempts to have them removed or prevented, is held up to odium and reproach, as dictated by bigotry, and as tending to revive old dissensions, and to defeat the delightful prospect of those halcyon days of peace which are anticipated under the reign of mutual forbearance and charity.

5. We may learn from this subject what is the temper of mind which becomes Christians in a time of abounding divisions in the church, and what are the qualities required in those who attempt to heal them. All have it in their power to contribute, in some degree, to the promoting of this work, and therefore ought to cherish the dispositions which correspond to it; although this is in a more eminent manner the duty of such as possess superior influence, or who, from their station, may be called to take a leading part in the negociations. And here I do not hesitate to name, as the primary qualification—*an inviolable love to truth and supreme regard to divine authority.* That person is totally disqualified for being a negociator, or for acting the most subordinate part in such a sacred treaty, whose pulse

does not beat high with this honourable and divine feeling. He will betray those interests which are in themselves the highest, and ought to be the dearest to all parties, whenever they are found irreconcilable with the attainment of an inferior object which he is determined to gain. When genuine, and pure, and enlightened, the feeling which we are recommending, so far from obstructing, as is often mistakingly imagined, will greatly facilitate and forward any negociation to which a good man would wish success.—The next place is due to—*a pacific disposition*. He who has said, "Love the truth and peace," intended to teach us, what we are sometimes disposed to disbelieve, that a regard to the former is not incompatible with a regard to the latter. In settling religious differences, the nice and difficult task is, to find out a way by which to adjust the claims of the two—to "seek peace and ensue it," without "erring from the truth;" and who so fit for this as "the peaceable and faithful in Israel," who are endued with "the wisdom that is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated *." If in any surely in religious contests, the maxim should be constantly kept in mind, The end of all war is peace. He is not a good Christian who does not sigh for it in the heat of the conflict, who does not court it in the moment of victory, who does not enjoy a triumph in sounding the trumpet which shall "bid the people return from following their brethren †." The man who loves

* 2 Sam. xx. 19. Jam. iii. 17. † 2 Sam. ii. 26.

to live in the fire of contention, who feeds on debate and controversy, whose thoughts are never turned to peace, but are "like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt," who is prepared to contest every point of common order as if it concerned the common salvation, is ever ready with his dissent, backed with its many reasons, against any ordinary measure which may not have obtained the sanction of his superior wisdom, and who flies off as soon as he finds that he cannot obtain his will in all things—this man is unfit for religious society, and though he may pretend to a zeal for God and religion, his zeal, like his wisdom, is not from above.

—*Christian candour* is another quality which is requisite. This displays itself in an openness of mind to conviction, a readiness to hear whatever may be advanced, a disposition to give and receive explanations, and to pay all becoming deference not only to the reasons, but also to the difficulties and scruples of brethren on the points of difference, and to relieve these so far as may be practicable, safe, and consistent with public duty. It is also opposed to concealment, dissimulation and all the crooked arts, by which worldly politicians conduct their negociations, and endeavour to obtain the best terms for their constituents. Far from those who engage in this holy work be all such Italian and Romish stratagems! Every one ought to speak the truth to his neighbour as he thinketh, without equivocation or mental reservation: there ought to be no masked proposals—no ambiguous declarations—no secret articles—no

understood agreement among leaders—no imposition on the credulity or the confidence of the Christian people. Genuine and unaffected candour has a powerful influence in inducing persons to persevere in a treaty when there may be great difficulties in the way of bringing it to a happy termination; whereas duplicity and art excite jealousy in the breasts of the intelligent, and if successfully practised, lay a foundation for future repentance and disquiet.—*The gift of knowledge and wisdom* is requisite. This work requires a union of the qualities of the men of Zebulon and Naphtali who came to David, "to turn the kingdom of Saul to him according to the word of the Lord;" they were "not of a double heart," and they "had understanding of the times to know what Israel ought to do *." That dexterity and knowledge of mankind which qualifies some individuals for settling ordinary disputes about the things of this life or in the church, will avail little in the work of which we speak. It requires an accurate acquaintance with the subjects of dispute in all their bearings—of the signs of the times, their duties, sins, and dangers,—of the real character and dispositions of the parties, and other circumstances which may go to determine the call we have to engage in such an undertaking, or to persevere in it;—not to mention an acquaintance with attempts of the same kind which have been made in former periods, with the effects which they produced or the causes of their

* 1 Chron. xii.

ill success.—Lastly, *a public and disinterested spirit* is indispensably requisite. Those individuals whom God has raised up in different ages to "do good to Zion in his good pleasure," have been eminently endued with this disposition. Such was Moses; who shewed himself fit for composing the strife of his afflicted brethren, when he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;" and proved himself worthy of "standing in the breach to turn away God's anger" from Israel, when he magnanimously declined the offer of Heaven to "make of him a great nation." Such also was Paul: who not only "became all things to all men," and "a servant to all," in things lawful and indifferent, but "could wish himself accursed from Christ for his brethren." There are no sacrifices which are in their power, which persons of this spirit will not be disposed to make for accomplishing so good and great a design—their worldly interests, their reputation and honour, their station in the church of God, provided it prove an obstacle, they will cheerfully relinquish and lay at the feet of their brethren.

If these dispositions were more generally and more strongly displayed, there would be no ground for despairing of the abolition of many of our religious differences. Some of them no doubt imply a diversity of views so radical and extensive that it would be unreasonable to look for their speedy removal. But the cure of others may be said to be more within our own power. In vindication of the perspicuity of the Scriptures, and

of the certainty of the standard of religion, it ought to be acknowledged that we often err from the path of duty, not so much because we cannot discover it, as because we are averse to it. "The light of the body is the eye; if thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light *." If those who were once united had been true to their light and single in their aims; if they had lived together as became brethren; if they had been at one as to the ends of their Christian profession, and continued resolved, through grace, to prosecute them, "notwithstanding of whatever trouble or persecution they might meet with in essaying the faithful discharge of their duty," fewer differences would have arisen among them, and these would have been more easily composed in the spirit of the gospel:—"whereunto they had attained they would have walked by the same rule, they would have minded the same things; and if in any thing they were otherwise minded, God would have revealed even this unto them †." When we are brought to a proper sense of the causes of our "divisions and offences," the cure of them will be more than half effected.

In fine, I would improve this subject for warning you against a twofold extreme into which persons are apt to run with respect to the present movements towards union. Beware of indifference to the object itself or to any scriptural means for attaining it. You are under the strongest obligations, not only to "pray for the peace of

* Matth. vi. 22. † Philip. iii. 15, 16.

Jerusalem," but also to be "workers together with God," who has promised to bestow this blessing. If others err by allowing this object to engross their attention, this will not excuse your lukewarmness, or your refusal to do what may be in your power, in your place and station, for promoting it in any degree. Hard-hearted must he be who can look unmoved on the wounds of the Church, or pass by, like the priest and levite in the parable, without feeling disposed to provide and pour in the healing oil and balm. It would be strange and unnatural indeed, if any son of Zion should rejoice in her trouble, and take pleasure in beholding perpetual strife and violence in the city of God, instead of seeing it a peaceful habitation. If a true Christian is unavoidably placed in a scene of confusion, he will sigh and pray for deliverance from it; and if conscience and the duty which he owes to God require him to say or do what may prove the occasion of disturbance or of alienating him from the affections of his brethren, he will sympathize deeply with the plaintive prophet, when he feelingly exclaims, "Wo is me, my mother, that thou hast born me a man of strife, and a man of contention to the whole earth! I have neither lent on usury, nor men have lent to me on usury; yet every one of them doth curse me *." No wonder that attempts to heal divisions have been made, proposals of conciliation started, and plans of union

* Jer. xv. 10.

concerted, in almost every age. The importance of the design might warrant them; and though they may not always have been in themselves proper or admissible, nor attended with success, yet the movers may deserve the praise and receive the blessing of peace-makers, so far as they singly intended and sincerely prosecuted an end confessedly laudable. Every person of right feeling will be disposed to construe charitably, and to censure with lenity, some errors and miscarriages which may be committed in the management of such attempts; provided no selfish interest or dishonest snare lurk under the mask of conciliation, and provided the plans do not evidently tend to produce other evils, greater than those which they propose to remedy.

It is no less necessary to warn you, on the other hand, against being ensnared by fair and plausible schemes of union. Remember that the Spirit of error takes an active part in the unions as well as in the divisions of Christians; and be not ignorant of his devices. Of old he deceived the people of God by raising the cry of Peace, peace; and so successful has he found this stratagem that he has ever since had recourse to it at intervals. There is a rage for peace as well as for contention, and men otherwise wise and good have been seized by it as well as the giddy multitude. If religion has suffered from merciless polemics and cruel dividers, history shews that it has suffered no less from the false lenity and unskilful arts of pretended physicians—the motely tribe of those who have assumed the name

of reconcilers. They will say that they have no intention to injure the truth; but it is your duty carefully to examine the tendency of their proposals, and not to suffer yourselves to be caught with "good words and fair speeches." Have nothing to do with those plans of agreement, in which the corner-stone is not laid in a sacred regard to all that is sanctioned by the authority of your Lord. Beware of all such coalitions as would require you to desert a faithful and necessary testimony for the truths and laws of Christ, would call you back from prosecuting a just warfare against any error or sin, would involve you in a breach of your lawful engagements, or prevent you from paying the vows you have made to God. Keep in mind that there are duties incumbent on you beside that of following peace. Violate not "the brotherly covenant" by which you may be already bound to walk with your fellow-Christians in a holy and good profession, from a fond and passionate desire of forming new connections. Throw not rashly away a present and known good for the prospect of a greater which is uncertain and contingent; and do not suffer your minds to be diverted from the ordinary duties of your Christian vocation, by engaging in extraordinary undertakings, while the call to these is not clear, and you have not good ground to depend on God for that extraordinary aid which is required in prosecuting them.

The text on which we have been discoursing, my friends, and others of the same kind in the sacred volume, will, if rightly improved, keep

you from this as well as the former extreme. If your hearts are established by a firm persuasion that God will, according to his promise and in his own time, restore unity and peace to his church, you will be kept equally from negligence and impatience, from indifference and precipitation. "Against hope you will believe in hope, that it shall be as God has said;" but you will "not make haste," nor have recourse to any improper means for obtaining the blessing. He knows to choose the best season for beginning and completing the work. We may think him remiss and slack in performing his promises, weary at his delays, attempt to anticipate him with unbelieving and impatient haste, or tempt him by saying presumptuously, "Let him make speed and hasten his work that we may see it, and let the counsel of the Holy One of Israel draw nigh and come that we may know it *." The check which our Saviour imposed on his disciples is needful here: "My time is not yet come, but your time is always ready †." He has ends, wise, important, and every way worthy of himself, to serve by permitting the continuance as well as the entrance of divisions. Divine truth must be cleared and purified from every foreign admixture by its being submitted to the ordeal of keen controversy. The faithfulness of its professed friends must be tried; the hypocrisy of false disciples detected; and the ignorance, imperfection, and mistakes, which cleave to the best disco-

* Isa. v. 19. † Jo. vii. 6.

vered. God must be glorified by preserving the cause of religion in the world, not only in opposition to its open enemies, but also amidst all the dissentions and rivalships and deadly feuds which prevail among its professed friends. When these and similar objects have been accomplished, he will "hasten his word to perform it." Having begun the good work, he will not draw back his hand until he has "finished it in righteousness."

Are there any who, when they hear of the future uniting of all Christians in profession, affection, and practice, are disposed to receive the intimation with a smile of incredulity, to treat the prospect as visionary, and to exclaim, 'How can these things be? Will God create a new race on the earth? Will he give a new structure to the minds of men? Will they not continue to think and act about religion as they have done from the beginning until now?' Hear the word of the Lord, ye scornful men: Is it a small matter for you to weary men, will ye weary my God also? Hath he not said, "I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear me?" And will he not do it? Let God be true, and every man a liar. When the time comes, the time which he hath set for accomplishing his promise, he shall arise, and every difficulty and every obstruction shall give way before him and vanish at his approach. Do you ask a sign? Do you ask it in the heaven above? It is he that "binds the sweet influences of Pleiades, and looses the" frozen "bands of Orion, and guides Arcturus

with his sons*." Do you ask it in the earth beneath? "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf, and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them; —for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea†." The Infinite One has, in his faithful word, pledged all his perfections for the accomplishment of this work. What resistance can be opposed to infinite power, put in motion by infinite love, and guided by infinite wisdom? He can raise up instruments properly qualified and disposed for promoting his design, guide their counsels, animate them to constancy and perseverance, and, finally crown all their exertions with the wished-for success. He has the hearts of all men in his hand, and can turn them like the waters in an aqueduct. He can rebuke the spirit of error and delusion, "cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land," and remove and abolish all things that offend in his kingdom. He can subdue the most stubborn and inveterate prejudices, allay the fiercest heats and animosities, convert jealousies into confidence and hatred into love, and having "made the wrath of man to praise him" by accomplishing his purposes, can "restrain the remainder thereof."

Who is among you that feareth the Lord, and obeyeth the voice of his servant, who walketh in darkness and hath no light as to the removal or

* Job xxxviii 31. † Isa. xi. 6—9.

abatement of the melancholy divisions of the church? Let him plant his faith firmly on the promises of Jehovah, and stay himself on his perfections. Say with the prophet Jeremiah, in a similar case, "Ah, Lord God! behold thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power; and there is nothing too hard for thee: The Great, the Mighty God, the Lord of Hosts is his name: Great in counsel, and mighty in work *." Place yourself in spirit in the midst of the emblematical valley into which Ezekiel was carried, and say, God who raiseth the dead can easily do this. Rivers, deep and broad, seas, noisy and tempestuous, "on which no galley with oars can go, neither gallant ship ride," have disparted the territories which the God of heaven hath given to his Son, and prevented the intercourse of his subjects. But he "shall utterly destroy the tongue of the Egyptian sea, and with his mighty wind he shall shake his hand over the river, and smite it in the seven streams thereof, and make men go over dryshod; and there shall be a highway for the remnant of his people, like as it was to Israel in the day that he came out of the land of Egypt †." Brazen "mountains of separation" may stand in the way of this desirable event. But the resistance which they oppose to it shall be overcome, not according to the confused plan of modern projectors, by throwing a scaffolding over them, by which those who have reared altars on their tops may hold occasional

* Jer. xxxii. 17—19. † Isa. xi. 15, 16.

intercourse and partial communion; but in a way becoming the New Testament Zeru-babel, The Disperser of Confusion. When he rends the heavens and comes down to do things which we looked not for, "the mountains shall flow down at his presence *." Those separations which have been of most ancient date, and which threatened to last for ever, shall yield to his power: "The everlasting mountains shall be scattered, the perpetual hills shall bow," before him whose "ways are everlasting†." If there shall be one that has reared its head above all the rest, and makes a more formidable resistance, it also shall crumble down and disappear: "Who art thou, O great mountain? Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain ‡. Then shall the mountain on which the house of God is built be established on the top of the mountains, and exalted above the hills, and all nations shall flow to it. And he will rebuke and repress the envious risings of its proudest rival. "A hill of God is the hill of Bashan, a high hill is the hill of Bashan. But why lift ye up yourselves, ye high hills? This (Zion) is the hill which God desireth to dwell in; yea, the Lord will dwell in it for ever §."

May God fulfil these promises in due time; and unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

* Isa. lxiv. 1. † Hab. iii. 6. ‡ Zech. iv. 7. § Ps. lxviii. 15, 16.

APPENDIX.

A Short View of the Plan of Religious Reformation and Union adopted originally by the Secession.

THE Bible is the great repository of divine truth, and standard of what is to be believed and practised in religion. It is the duty of the church to bring forth the sacred treasure, to circulate it, and to preserve any part of it from being lost, debased, or deteriorated. Ever since the completing of the canon of Scripture, it has been the work of Christians, individually and as associated, to make profession of "the faith once delivered to the saints," and "earnestly to contend" for it, in opposition to all attempts to destroy its purity or defeat its influence. That society whose religious profession is not founded on and conformable to the Scriptures, can have no claim to be considered as "the house of the living God." But while the matter, as well as the ground, of the church's profession is properly speaking divine, the acts and modes of professing and maintaining it are necessarily human. When false and corrupt views of Christianity become general, it is necessary that confessions of the truth in opposition to them be embodied

in formal and written documents, which may be known and read by all men. *Vox emissa perit : litera scripta manet.* It is not enough that Christians confess their faith individually : to comply with divine commands, to answer to their character as church members, and the better to gain the ends in view, it is requisite that they make a joint and common confession. When the truths contained in the word of God have been explicitly stated and declared, in opposition to existing errors, by the proper authority in a church, an approbation of such statements and declarations may be required, as a test of soundness in the faith and of Christian fidelity, without any unwarrantable imposition on conscience, or the most distant reflection on the perfection of Scripture. The same arguments which justify the use of creeds and confessions will also justify particular declarations or testimonies directed against errors and corruptions prevailing in churches which still retain scriptural formularies. Those who allow the former cannot consistently condemn the latter. It is not sufficient to entitle persons to the character of faithful witnesses of Christ, that they profess a general adherence to the Bible or a sound confession of faith, provided they refuse or decline to direct and apply these seasonably against present evils. It might as well be said that the soldier has acquitted himself well in a battle, because he had excellent armour lying in a magazine, or a sword hanging by his side, although he never brought forth the armour nor drew his sword from its scabbard. The means alluded to are the unsheathing of the sword and the wielding of the armour of the church. So far from setting aside the authority of Scripture, they are necessary for keeping a sense of it alive on the spirits of men, and for declaring the joint views and animating the combined endeav-

ours of those who adhere to it. By explaining and applying a rule, we do not add to it, nor do we detract from its authority.

True religion, intrinsically considered, is neither variable nor local. Christianity is the same now that it was eighteen hundred years ago; it is the same in America or Otaheite as in Britain. But this is not inconsistent with varieties in the profession made of it in different ages and countries. The attack is not always made on it from the same quarter, nor directed against the same point. This must regulate the faithful contendings of the church; and accordingly her testimony, though ever substantially the same, has been greatly diversified in respect of its form and direction; just as a river, in its long-continued course, assumes different appearances, winds in several directions, and is seen running sometimes in a narrower and at other times in a more extensive channel. In the New Testament we meet with frequent references to the circumstances in which the churches were placed among the adherents of Judaism or of Pagan idolatry, as serving to point out and determine the peculiar duties, dangers, and temptations of Christians. The instructions, warnings, and reproofs, contained in the epistles which the apostles addressed primarily to certain churches and individuals, bear directly on their respective circumstances, and are intermingled with numerous references to facts on which they were founded. Certain classes of false teachers and evil workers are specified; and individuals are mentioned by name, both those who had deserved well of the church by their faithfulness and important services, and those who, by their opposition to the gospel and propagating of false doctrine, had incurred public censure or justly exposed themselves to it. In the letters sent to the seven Asian churches,

our Lord intimates that he took notice and judged of the conduct of each according to its particular and local circumstances, and not merely in reference to duties and trials common to all. " I know thy works, and where thou dwellest." The church of Ephesus is praised because she " could not bear them that were evil," had tried and convicted certain persons who " said they were apostles and were not," and had testified her hatred to " the deeds of the Nicolaitans." While the church of Pergamos is blamed for retaining in her communion " them that held the doctrine of Balaam and of the Nicolaitans," she is commended by Christ, because she had " held fast his name and not denied his faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was his faithful martyr, who was slain among them." There are peculiar obligations which Christians are subjected to by their birth and lot in the world; and then, and then only, can they be said to act a faithful part, when they endeavour to discharge their duty in all its extent according to their actual and relative situation. So far is it from being true, in this respect, that a religious profession ought to be disencumbered of all localities or references to the facts of a particular period or country, that, on the contrary, its due and seasonable application to these is a test of its faithfulness.

At the happy era of the Reformation, many of the grosser corruptions which had grown during the long continued defection which had preceded, were removed in several countries: and in some of these, particularly in Scotland, religion was settled on a Scriptural basis and in great purity. Had reformation been at its height in all the protestant churches, or had that which was attained in some of them been placed beyond the danger of being changed or relinquished, there would have been no need for testimo-

nies or contendings in the way of separation from them. Few will pretend that this is the case. In the constitutions of some of these churches the features of the Man of Sin are but too visible, and those of them that were most renowned for beauty have given evidence of their defectibility by actually falling into decay. To rectify the one and recover the other is a work which deserves the attention and utmost endeavours of all who wish well to the interests of religion. And to accomplish these ends in some degree within their sphere, was what those who declared a Secession from the established Church of Scotland proposed by the association which they formed, and avowed in the Testimony or Declaration of their views and intentions which they published to the world. As their object has been much misunderstood, and as mistaken, or narrow and partial notions of it have been adopted, not only by their opponents, but also by not a few of their professed friends, it may perhaps be of some use to take a cursory view of it.

Some have represented Seceders as holding a set of religious principles altogether peculiar to themselves, and have attempted, ignorantly or artfully, to set these in opposition to the principles held in common by other Christians and Protestants. Such a representation is groundless and injurious. Their profession, while it rests on the ground common to all true Protestants, the supreme authority of Scripture, embraces the general interests of Christianity, and gives them their due place and importance. Whatever others, as Christians, Protestants, or Presbyterians, profess and glory in, they vindicate as theirs too, and have embodied in their testimony. With respect to those things by which they are distinguished in principle or in practice, from other denominations of Presbyterians, and which will be called *their* peculi-

arities, they plead that these are either expressly warranted by the word of God and the subordinate formularies of the Church of Scotland, or follow from them, as conclusions from premises and corollaries from geometrical axioms. And they plead further that these are, in different respects, necessary to the support and the consistent maintenance of the other. On the contrary, some late partial historians of the Secession have done injury to its cause in another way. In order to present it in a point of view more attractive to the spirit of the present age, or more congenial to their own sentiments, they have narrowed its ground, thrown some of its prominent parts into shade, and fixed the attention wholly on others, which, however important in the eyes of the founders of the Secession, never occupied their entire and exclusive regards. The exertions which they made in defence of the leading doctrines of the gospel, and the rights of the Christian people, are too well known to stand in need of empty panegyric; and those do little honour to their memory who deal in this, while they disparage or throw a veil over their contendings in behalf of a great and extensive cause of which these formed but a part.

When it appeared that there was no reasonable prospect of the grounds of their separation being removed, and of their being able to return conscientiously into the bosom of the established church, the Seceding ministers found it their duty to dispense divine ordinances to those through the country who laboured under the same grievances with themselves. But they did not act on the limited principle, afterwards adopted by another society, of merely affording relief to those who felt galled and oppressed by the yoke of Patronage; nor did they think that they could discharge the duty which, as ministers of Christ

and of the Church of Scotland, they owed to the existing and subsequent generations, if they confined their endeavours to the promoting of what immediately concerned the spiritual interests of those who might place themselves under their ministerial and judicative inspection. They felt that there was a public cause, and more general and extensive interests, which had a claim upon them. They, along with the people adhering to them, had, for a series of years, been testifying, in communion with the established church, against a variety of evils deeply affecting the interests of religion, or, as they express it in their Deed of Secession, "a course of defection from our reformed and covenanted principles." Finding themselves now placed in a new situation, and in the possession of greater liberty than they had formerly enjoyed; looking around them on the religious state of the church and nation with which they were connected; and taking into serious consideration the manifold obligations under which they lay, they judged themselves called, "in the course of sovereign and holy providence, to essay the revival of reformation," and to employ all the means competent to them for advancing this work. In prosecution of this design they published their Judicial Testimony and other official papers, settled the terms of their communion, and regulated their public managements.

The object proposed by the founders of this association was of a precise and definite kind. As they did not push themselves forward, nor put their hand to a work of such difficulty, without being satisfied of the call which they had to engage in it, nor propose to do more for its advancement than providence might put in their power, and lay within their sphere as an ecclesiastical body; so they did not conceal the objects which they aimed at, nor leave the world in

any doubt as to their nature and extent. It was a specific reformation which they proposed. They did not come forward in the suspicious character of general reformers, who would not avow what they intended to pull down, and did not know what they would build up in its room; they did not plan a reform according to a scheme of principles of their own; nor was it their object to overturn that church which had lately driven them from its communion. But they appeared as a part of the Church of Scotland, adhering to her reformed constitution, testifying against the injuries which it had received, seeking the redress of these, and pleading for the revival of a reformation, attained, according to the word of God, in a former period, approved by every authority in the land, and ratified by solemn vows to the Most High. Without right views of this Reformation it is impossible to understand the Secession Testimony; and disaffection to the former, in proportion to the degree in which it prevails, necessarily implies a dereliction of the latter.

The same principles which led our fathers in Scotland to free themselves from the tyranny and corruptions of Rome induced their successors to cast off the imposed yoke of a protestant hierarchy, and to rid themselves of the abuses which it had brought along with it. When they associated for this purpose, they needed only to renew the covenant by which popery had been first abjured, with a few slight explications and accommodations of its language to their existing circumstances. It is not, therefore, needful for me to go farther back than the Second Reformation, as it is usually called, which took place between the year 1638 and 1650, and which embodied, in its proceedings and settlement, all the valuable attainments of the First Reformation, and carried

them to a greater extent. These included summarily,—the revival of the purity of doctrine, which had been corrupted by Popish errors introduced under the new garb of Arminianism—of the purity of worship, which had been depraved by the imposition of foreign rites and ceremonies—and of the government, discipline, and liberties of the church, which had been supplanted and overthrown by royal supremacy and the usurpations of prelacy.

But the most important and discriminating feature of this period was the extension of the Reformation to England and Ireland. It is well known that religion was very imperfectly reformed in the first as well as in the last of these countries, and that many Popish abuses and corruptions were allowed to remain in its worship and government. These defects had been all along complained of by the best English Protestants, who often sighed for the purity and freedom of religion enjoyed by their neighbours. The growing oppression of the ecclesiastical courts, the religious innovations tending to pave the way for peace with Rome, and the invasions on the civil liberties of the nation, during the early administration of Charles I. inflamed these complaints and wishes, and communicated them to the greater and better part of that kingdom. The struggle which ensued between the friends of reformation and liberty on the one hand, and an arbitrary and popishly-affected court on the other, led to the formation of the famous *Solemn League*, which had for its principal and leading object the preservation of the reformed religion in Scotland, the reformation of religion in England and Ireland, and the bringing of the churches in the three kingdoms to the nearest conjunction and uniformity in doctrine, worship, discipline, and government. From this time the Reformation in Scotland,

England, and Ireland was combined, and whatever may since have been its actual fate in any of these countries, its true and enlightened friends have never ceased to regard it as one common object of interest, and, so far as it was in their power to promote it, of endeavour and exertion. The steps taken to fulfil these sacred stipulations, the progress made in the work, and the causes of its being interrupted in England, endangered in Scotland, and at last perfidiously overthrown in the three kingdoms, are known to all who are not utter strangers to the most interesting and eventful period of the history of Britain.

The work of which we speak was properly one—a reformation of religion; although we usually speak of it as ecclesiastical and civil, in respect of the two authorities engaged in carrying it on. The *Ecclesiastical* Reformation, in Scotland, consisted of what was done by the judicatories of the church, to whom it belonged directly and properly to set in order the house of God, and to correct what was amiss in religious profession or practice. This includes the condemning of the episcopal innovations and abuses, the reviving of the presbyterian worship and discipline, and in general the raising up of the ancient constitution of the church from the rubbish in which it had been buried for many years; all of which was preceded by the renewing of the National Covenant. It includes also the encouragement given by the General Assembly to the proposals of union with England and Ireland, their forming and promoting of the Solemn League and Covenant, sending of commissioners to the Assembly of Divines at Westminster, receiving and approving of the formularies agreed on by that Assembly, and proceeding to act on them as subordinate standards of that religious unity and conjunction between the churches in the three kingdoms

which they had sworn to promote. The *Civil* Reformation consists in what was done by the civil authorities, within their sphere, and in co-operation with the ecclesiastical judicatories, for advancing the same cause. This includes what was done by the Parliament, or the Convention of Estates, in Scotland, (not to speak at present of the Parliament of England) in abolishing episcopacy, legalizing what the church had done in the revival of presbytery, entering into and prosecuting the ends of the League with England and Ireland, sanctioning the standards of uniformity, ratifying the liberties of the church and abolishing patronage, reforming places of power and trust, and settling the constitutional laws of the kingdom in such a way as to secure the reformation which had been attained.

When Seceders, in their Testimony and other public papers, speak of our Civil Reformation, they do not mean a reform objectively civil, or which embraced objects which were purely civil and political. They express an approbation of the struggles of our ancestors in behalf of civil liberty, which, indeed, was at that period closely and inseparably connected with religion. But they were aware that it was incompetent for them as a religious body to bear a testimony in favour of a particular form of civil government, or of certain laws as contributing most to the political welfare of a people. They can be understood only as referring to civil laws and managements, so far as they had religion for their object, or as they affected and were in one way or another connected with its interests, by contributing to its advancement or security. And in the same sense must we understand them, when they condemn the political settlement by which the reformation was overturned, or particular parts of

the existing constitution and laws. Viewed in this light, an approbation of "our ancient Civil Reformation," and a disapprobation of "our present civil deformation," form a necessary and important branch of their testimony and profession*.

* Speaking of the *Judicial Act and Testimony*, the Associate Presbytery say, in their Answers to Mr Nairn; "According to the particular calls of providence hitherto, that Testimony,—was especially in favours of our ancient *ecclesiastical* Reformation; and against those evils whereby the same hath been, in a great measure, departed from and overthrown: while a Testimony for our ancient *civil* reformation,—and against these evils whereby the same hath been, in a great measure, deviated from and destroyed; was lifted up, and all along carried forward.—But, at this time, the Presbytery have a particular call of providence, —to bear witness more especially unto our ancient *civil* reformation." Having laid down in general the principles on which such a reformation rests, they proceed to say: "Agreeably unto all this, the Deed of Civil Constitution was set upon a reformed footing; by Act VIII. Parl. I. James VI. Though the above settlement was, for some time, followed by suitable administration; yet a course of lamentable defection and corruption therein did soon prevail: 'Till a reviving of the true religion and reformation in the Church took place, and was gloriously advanced betwixt the years 1638 and 1650. That work of God, which became then engaged unto throughout the three kingdoms by a solemn League and Covenant,—was also, in an agreeableness to this Covenant, accompanied with and supported by a civil reformation. In England (wherewith we have become more nearly concerned than formerly, by virtue of the Solemn League and Covenant), the civil administration was, in some valuable instances, subservient unto the said work of God. But more considerable advances were made in Scotland: While, beside many laudable acts in the civil administration, the deed of Civil Constitution was farther reformed than ever before; by Act XV. of the second session of Parliament, anno 1649. And according unto this settlement, was King Charles II. crowned at Scone; January 1st. 1651.

"The Presbytery intend not to affirm, that there was nothing defective in the above managements; or that no imprudencies

By the good hand of God upon her, Scotland attained to greater purity in religion, and higher degrees of reformation, than any other protestant country. It is the duty of one generation to declare the works of God to another, and no people can depart from religious attainments without being deeply guilty. But this is not all. In no nation has the true religion been so solemnly avouched as in Scotland. Every important step taken in reformation was accompanied with confessions, protestations, vows, covenants, and oaths, which were made and subscribed by all ranks, voluntarily, cheerfully, joyfully, repeated on every new emergency and call, and ratified by every authority in the land. Hence, it has obtained the distinguishing name of the *covenanted* reformation; and under this view was it embraced by the associated body of Seceders, who, by renewing these engagements in an oath adapted to the time and to their circumstances as a church, served themselves heirs to the professions, vows, and contendings of their fathers, or rather to the cause of God transmitted to them by their fathers under all these sacred sanctions and solemnities.

It is of importance to distinguish between the re-

or mistakes were to be found therein. It is evident, however, that, by the good hand of God, the Estates of England, but more especially of Scotland, were inspired with a noble and predominant zeal for the House of God, in all its valuable institutions; and attained to a considerable pitch of civil reformation, subservient unto the same: All which this Presbytery desires, with thankfulness, to commemorate and bear witness unto. Upon the whole, it is observable, that in Scotland, the reformation of the church hath always, in a beautiful order, preceded and introduced the reformation of the State." (Display of the Secession Testimony, vol. i. p. 278, 281—284.)

formation *materially* and *formally* considered. The Westminster standards were not the reformation, nor did they form any part of it farther than they were received and approved, and than religion was reformed and settled according to them. We may approve of the Confessions of the reformed church of France, or of Helvetia, or of Holland. In like manner persons may approve of the Westminster standards, as to doctrine, worship, and church-government, and a religious society may conduct its ecclesiastical affairs according to them; and yet they may not adopt or promote the covenanted reformation properly and formally considered. To adhere to these, since the reformation took place, is to adopt them as a system of religion which is still entitled, both by divine and by human right, to be professed and established in the three nations;—to testify against all proceedings prejudicial to it, and all laws introducing or maintaining another system, as what no friend of reformation can bind himself actively to support and countenance;—and to hold that it is the duty of all classes to endeavour, in their station and by all lawful means, to have the reformed and presbyterian religion publicly and legally settled,—and that from the consideration not only of the divine authority on which it rests and its intrinsic excellence, but also of the additional obligation arising from national oaths and leagues, and the former attainments and laws of church and state, which are still virtually pleadable and in a moral point of view retain their force. Thus formally was the covenanted reformation adopted and testified for by Seceders *. Hence the parti-

* "The profession, defence, and maintenance of the true religion, in doctrine, worship, discipline, and Presbyterial church-government, agreeable unto and founded upon the word of God,

cularity with which they specified and condemned, in their judicial acts, the various steps of deviation from this cause in Church and in State. They condemned not only the series of wicked laws passed at the Restoration, but also various evils in the Revolution settlement, and in the incorporating Union, by the fundamental articles of which Scotland was "more deeply involved in perjury" by giving her consent to " the maintenance and preservation of the hierarchy and ceremonies of the Church of England *." Hence also the care with which they guarded against all professions or engagements which implied an approbation of these defections and of the united constitution. They evinced this by declining to swear the usual public oaths, at the expence of relinquishing privileges to which they were otherwise entitled, and of exposing themselves to the charge of disloyalty from those who were ignorant of their principles or disposed to misrepresent them †.

—was secured by the fundamental constitution of the civil government in our reforming periods; which deed of constitution, *in all moral respects*, is *morally* unalterable,—because of its agreeableness to the divine will revealed in the Word, and because it was attained to and fixed in pursuance of our solemn Covenants." The Associate Presbytery's Answers to Mr Nairn, in Display, i. 274. In the same paper, the Presbytery, after deploring " the fatal overthrow of the former civil reformation" at the Restoration, and pointing out in what respects the settlements at the Revolution and Union were inconsistent with it, concludes thus : " Upon the whole, it appears, that, under the present constitution, a mighty bar is thrust in the way of our covenanted reformation, both in Church and State: yea, a gravestone is laid and established on the same." Ibid. p. 286.

* Ibid. p. 285.

† Answers to Mr Nairn; ibid. p. 291. The inconsistency of an unqualified approbation of the present constitution with ad-

This is the fair amount of their principles on this head, and what they never sought to conceal from the beginning. But they, at the same time, denied that any minority, and far less, that they themselves, as an ecclesiastical body, had any right to dictate laws to the nation. They reckoned that they did all that was incumbent on them, when they gave information and warning, as they were called from time to time, respecting public sins and duties, and when they continued to promote religious reformation within their own sphere. They did not stretch themselves beyond their line, nor suffer themselves to be diverted, by the testimony which they bore against public evils, from opposing those of a more private kind, and whose remedy lay more directly within their reach; nor did they, it is hoped, become indifferent about those ends which ought to be kept immediately in view by every church of Christ—the salvation of sinners, and building up of saints on their most holy faith. They never judged that they had a call to address the throne or the legislature on the subject of religion; and they knew that no such change as they desired can take place in the national profession and laws with regard to it, until a previous change shall have been effected on the sentiments and inclinations of the various orders of the people *.

herence to a previous reformation, is maintained by the Associate Presbytery in that Public Deed, the express design of which is to condemn "the dangerous extreme, which some had gone into, of impugning the present civil authority over these nations and subjection thereunto in lawful commands,—on account of the want of these qualifications Magistrates ought to have by the word of God and our covenants; even although they allow us the free exercise of our religion, and are not manifestly unhinging the liberties of the kingdom."

* Ibid. p. 280.

I know that it has now become fashionable to discredit this work, and to represent every appearance of attachment to it as a sure mark of bigotry, and a mind weakly wedded to ancient prejudices, or, as some modishly express it, to the relics of a barbarous age. To the most of our modern great pretenders to religion the very name of a Covenanted Reformation is offensive and intolerable. Many who would still fain speak well of it, look upon any thing that was good in it as of temporary interest, and quite unsuitable to our times; while the greater part of those who once appeared as its avowed and sworn friends, after shrinking from the odium attached to it, and testifying their willingness to divide the cause, appear now to be ashamed even to name it. But is there any good reason for this? I may venture to assert, that if ever all that was great and valuable to a people was concerned in any work, it was concerned in that under our consideration. The design was nothing less than the advancement of true religion, in connection with liberty—of religion, in all its extent, among individuals, families, and the public, and the providing, in the best manner, for the continuance and perpetuity of it in the three kingdoms, that unborn posterity might reap the fruits of the toil and travel and sufferings of their fathers, and might live happily in peace and in the fear of God. It proposed the correction of abuses which had long been matter of grievance; and the settlement of religion and church-order on scriptural principles and agreeably to known and approved precedents, and not according to any visionary, hazardous, or untried scheme. It was the effect of long and ardent wishes, and of many prayers. The wisest and most godly in Britain, from the commencement of the Reformation, had desired to see

such a work, and hailed it at a distance. Providence afforded an opportunity for engaging in it when it was least expected, and for some time smiled on the attempt. Nor was it overturned until the benefits to be expected from it were attested in the experience of thousands, who till then had been almost total strangers to Christianity.

Let sober thinkers only reflect for a moment, what advantages would have ensued, if religion had been settled agreeably to the Solemn League and the plan recommended by the Westminster Assembly; and if that settlement had been allowed to stand. Of what benefit would it have been to England, if a lordly hierarchy, together with a burdensome and unprofitable mass of human rites and ceremonies, and an ignorant, idle, and scandalous clergy, had been removed; and if, in their place, an evangelical, pious, laborious, and regular ministry had been settled in every parish, with elders to inspect the morals of the people, and deacons to attend to the wants of the poor, under the superintendence of presbyteries and synods! Would not this have proved of incalculable advantage to that nation, in a religious, moral, and political point of view? Would it not have been a powerful check on the spread of error, the increase of schism, and the prevalence of ignorance, profaneness, and vice? Of what benefit might it not have been before this day to unhappy Ireland, which has been perhaps more indebted to colonies from Scotland, and to the religion imported by them, than to any boon it has received from England! And would not great benefit have redounded from it to Scotland herself, whose ecclesiastical constitution and liberties, as well as the religious principles and habits of her people, have suffered so much formerly and of late, from her intimate connec-

tion with a country, in which a system opposite in various respects to hers has been established? If there is any truth in the representation now given, let me again ask, Is it not matter of the deepest regret that this work should have been interrupted and overturned? That it continues still buried? That an opposite system was reared on its grave, which has been and still is productive of manifold evils? Are not these national sins? Is it possible to free them from the high aggravation of perfidy, after the solemn pledges that were publicly exchanged and ratified? Is it not a great duty to testify against these sins, and to seek a revival of that Reformation? This is what has been done by Seceders. If this forms their peculiarity, they have reason to glory in, not to be ashamed of it; and the only real disgrace which they can incur is that which will attach to their withdrawing from the cause, and deserting their good profession.

In considering this cause there are two things which are very commonly overlooked, and which merit particular attention. In the first place, it embraced *a plan of religious union*. This was its avowed object. It was so from the beginning, and was kept in eye through the whole progress of the work. Reformation was a means to this end. It was indeed absolutely necessary to the attainment of it. The corruptions retained in the English Church—the hierarchy, with its usurped claims, temporal and spiritual, the liturgy, the total absence of all ecclesiastical discipline, a non-resident and non-preaching clergy, the Arminian and Popish errors which they had patronized,—these, with various abuses connected with them, had proved a source of continued discord and division in England, had embroiled her with Scotland, and served as a wall of partition between her and all foreign churches

professing the same faith. Until these evils were removed it was vain to look for union either at home or abroad. The platform of reformation was so constructed as to promise the accomplishment of this desirable object. The system of faith laid down in the Confession and Catechisms was substantially the same with what was declared in the Confessions and Catechisms of all the reformed on the Continent. The form of church-government was "according to the word of God and the example of the best reformed churches." Public worship was set free from the trammels of a formal and stinted liturgy, and at the same time duly guarded by the Directory, which, while it "held forth such things as are of divine institution in every ordinance," regulated others "according to the rules of Christian prudence, agreeable to the general rules of the word of God," and gave such instructions to ministers as tended to produce "a consent of all the churches in those things that contain the substance of the service and worship of God." The more narrowly the proceedings of the Assembly which prepared the model of religious reformation and uniformity are looked into, the more, I am persuaded, will it appear, that, in the conclusions to which they came, (particularly on the controversies which arose at that time among the friends of religion), they displayed a healing and moderate spirit, combined with an enlightened regard to truth and the general welfare of the church, which shewed them to be uncommonly fitted for the great task which Providence assigned to them, and which has not been displayed in the same degree by any assembly, extraordinary or ordinary, which the world has since seen.

The second thing to which I alluded as meriting

particular notice in this work, is *the extensive scale* on which it was undertaken. Its object was not only to reform and unite, but to reform religion and settle unity through three kingdoms. Nor was this all. Though called more immediately to provide for their own safety and to promote Christianity in that part of the world where they dwelt, those who embarked in it did not confine their views to this object. They had before their eyes the security of "the true religion and professors thereof in all places," the forming of an association among "other Christian churches," and in general "the enlargement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ." These ends, expressed in their solemn bond of confederation, were never lost sight of in the prosecution of their undertaking. Theirs was no narrow, contracted, or sectarian plan. On the contrary, it was one of their principal objects, in all that they did, to testify their charity and conformity to all the reformed churches, to abolish those restrictions which had prevented free intercourse with them, and to secure union, communion, and co-operation with them upon the great principles of Christianity and Protestantism.

Under both of these important views was the Reformation adopted by Seceders. In publishing their Testimony, their language on the matter was: 'We have no *peculiar* principles: we abide by and declare our adherence to those books which are still professedly owned by the national Church of Scotland, and which were agreed on as the standards of religious uniformity in the three nations; we are willing to hold communion with all who shall be found consistently adhering to these; and to them as a subordinate test we are ready to submit the decision of every point which forms the subject of dis-

pute and controversy between us and others.' The same language all true adherents to the cause of the Reformation still continue to hold. The same offers they still make.—In vindicating their Secession, and stating its grounds, they were necessarily led to give greater prominence to the state of religion in Scotland and to their contendings with the judicatories of that church with which they had been intimately connected. But they did not allow these to engross their regard. They considered it as a high duty to promote religion in England and Ireland, which are as much interested in the cause of the Secession, rightly understood, as Scotland. When they complied with petitions from these countries, and erected congregations in consequence of them, they did not lay themselves open to the charge of enlisting followers under the standard of a party, or engaging them in local controversies in which they had no concern; but could plead, with the utmost truth, that they only embodied them under principles and obligations, which were common to the three nations. In fine, while they considered themselves bound to do what in them lay to enlarge the kingdom of Christ, they reckoned that they had a special call to send the gospel to those distant parts of the world where there were settlers from this country; and by the exertions which they made in this way from an early period, multitudes have enjoyed the means of religious instruction and salvation who would otherwise have been left totally destitute of them.

When the Secession from the Church of Scotland was first declared, its friends were not under the necessity of proving the leading principles in which their Testimony in favour of the Reformation pro-

ceeded. This had been the work of their fathers; and they were not called to lay again the foundation, when there were few around them who attacked it. Their opponents, while they condemned them for testifying in the way of separation from the established church, went along with them in owning the whole doctrine of the Westminster Confession, the divine right of Presbytery, and even the continued obligation of our National Covenants. The state of matters is now, and has for a considerable time been, very different. All these have been attacked with great keenness from various quarters; and it no longer remains a matter of doubt or dispute, that the greater part of Seceders themselves have relinquished their adherence to the Reformation cause, and are disposed to call in question those things which were once most surely believed among them. A vindication of these has become more than ever necessary. This, however, is not proposed in these pages. All that I mean is to suggest a few things which may tend to obviate the difficulties of such as still feel attached to the cause, while their minds have been thrown into confusion and embarrassment by the specious and plausible objections which have been confidently advanced against it. And I shall endeavour to do this with all possible succintness.

One of the most common and startling objections brought forward is that which involves a charge against the Westminster Confession of Faith, as favourable to persecution for conscience' sake, and arming the civil magistrate with a power to punish good and peaceable subjects purely on the ground of their religious opinions and practices. This is a charge which affects all who have owned that Confession, or who declare a simple adherence to it; and among

these are many, who, it will not be denied, have shewn themselves strenuous friends of the rights of conscience, and who were not likely to subscribe any formulary which they had not examined and did not believe. The passage chiefly referred to is in Chap. xx. sect. 4. Let us try if it justifies the charge.

In the second section the doctrine of liberty of conscience is thus laid down: "God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments, is to betray true liberty of conscience and reason also; and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also." This is an important doctrine, and necessary to be maintained against the encroachments and unwarrantable claims of every creature, and of rulers both civil and ecclesiastical. May every man then think and speak, and act as he pleases, under the plea that his conscience gives him liberty to do so, or dictates to him that he ought to do so? To guard against this pernicious abuse of the doctrine is the object of what follows in the Confession. In section third, those are condemned, who, "upon pretence of Christian liberty, do practise any sin or cherish any lust." The design of section fourth, is to guard against the abuse of the doctrine in reference to public authority. "And because the powers which God hath ordained, and the liberty which Christ hath purchased, are not intended by God to destroy, but mutually to uphold and preserve one another; they who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, shall oppose any lawful power, or the lawful exercise of it, whether

it be civil or ecclesiastical, resist the ordinance of God." He who is the Lord of the conscience has also instituted the authorities in church and state; and it would be in the highest degree absurd to suppose that he has planted in the breast of every individual a power to resist, counteract, and nullify his own ordinances. When public and private claims interfere and clash, the latter must give way to the former; and when any lawful authority is proceeding lawfully within its line of duty it must be understood as possessing a rightful power to remove out of the way every thing which necessarily obstructs its progress. The Confession proceeds, accordingly, to state: "And for their publishing of such opinions, or maintaining of such practices, as are contrary to the light of nature, or to the known principles of Christianity, whether concerning faith, worship, or conversation, or to the power of godliness; or such erroneous opinions or practices, as either in their own nature, or in the manner of publishing or maintaining them, are destructive to the external peace and order which Christ hath established in the church; they may lawfully be called to account, and proceeded against by the censures of the church, and by the power of the civil magistrate." Now, this does not say that all who publish such opinions and maintain such practices as are mentioned, may be proceeded against, or, punished (if the substitution of this word shall be insisted for) by the civil magistrate; nor does it say, that any good and peaceable shall be made liable to this process simply on the ground of religious opinions published and practices maintained by him. For, in the *first* place, persons of a particular character are spoken of in this paragraph, and these are very different from good and peaceable subjects. They

are described in the former sentence as " they who *oppose* lawful power or the lawful exercise of it," and " *resist* the ordinance of God." The same persons are spoken of in the sentence under consideration, as appears from the copulative and relative. It is not said "*Any one* for publishing," &c. but " they who *oppose* any lawful power &c. for *their* publishing," &c. In the *second* place, this sentence specifies some of the ways in which these persons may become chargeable with the opposition mentioned, and consequently " *may* be called to account;" but it does not assert that even they must or ought to be prosecuted for every avowed opinion or practice of the kind referred to. All that it necessarily implies, is, that they may be found opposing lawful powers or the lawful exercise of them in the things specified, and that they are not entitled to plead a general irresponsibility in matters of that kind: notwithstanding such a plea, " they may be called to account and proceeded against." For, be it observed, it is not the design of this paragraph to state the objects of church censure or civil prosecution: its proper and professed object is to interpose a check on the abuse of liberty of conscience as operating to the prejudice of just and lawful authority. It is not sin *as sin*, but as *scandal*, or injurious to the spiritual interests of Christians, that is the proper object of church-censure; and it is not for sins as such, but for *crimes*, that persons become liable to punishment by magistrates. The compilers of the Confession were quite aware of these distinctions, which were then common. Some think that if the process of the magistrate had been limited to offences " contrary to the light of nature," it would have been perfectly justifiable; but the truth is, that it would have been

so only on the interpretation now given. To render an action the proper object of magistratical punishment, it is not enough that it be contrary to the law of God, whether natural or revealed; it must, in one way or another, strike against the public good of society. He who "provides not for his own, especially those of his own house," sins against "the light of nature," as also does he who is "a lover of pleasures more than of God;" but there are few who will plead that magistrates are bound to proceed against and punish every idler and belly-god. On the other hand there are opinions and practices "contrary to the known principles of Christianity," or grafted upon them, which either in their own nature, or from the circumstances with which they may be clothed, may prove so injurious to the welfare of society in general, or of particular nations, or of their just proceedings, or of lawful institutions established in them, as to subject their publishers and maintainers to warrantable coercion and punishment. As one point to which these may relate, I may mention the external observance and sanctification of the Lord's Day, which can be known only from "the principles of Christianity," and is connected with all the particulars specified by the Confession—"faith, worship, conversation, the power of godliness, and the external order and peace of the church." That many other instances of a similar description can be produced, will be denied by no sober-thinking person who is well acquainted with popish tenets and practices, and with those which prevailed among the English sectaries during the sitting of the Westminster Assembly; and he who does not deny this, cannot be entitled, I should think, upon any principles of fair construction, to fix the stigma of persecution on the passage in question.

In support of the objection under consideration some have referred to chap. 23. of the Confession, in which it is stated to be the magistrate's duty to "take order that—all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed," &c. But as certain means by which he is to endeavour to effect this end are there mentioned, without one word about coercion or punishment, every person must perceive that that passage gives no occasion for such an inference.—Others appeal to passages in the private writings of presbyterians at the period when the Confession was compiled. But it is evidently unjust to attempt in this way to fasten on a public deed an odious sense which its own language does not natively and necessarily imply. Would all those who wish to make Rutherford's treatise on *Pretended Liberty of Conscience* an authentic interpreter of the passages in question, be willing to make the same use of his treatise on *Spiritual Antichrist* with reference to the doctrine taught by the Confession on the Covenant of Grace? Or, would they be willing that the same use should be made of the writings of individuals in the present day in disputes about the principles of the bodies with which they are connected, before the public or before courts of judicature?

Another objection brought against the Confession is, that it subjects matters purely religious and ecclesiastical to the cognizance of the civil magistrate, and allows him an Erastian power in and over the church. This, if true, would be very strange, considering that the Assembly who compiled it were engaged in a dispute against this very claim with the Parliament under whose protection they sat, and that owing to their steady refusal to concede that power to the State (in which they were supported by

the whole body of Presbyterians), the erection of presbyteries and synods in England was suspended. Independently of this important fact, the declarations of the Confession itself are more than sufficient to repel the imputation. It declares "that there is no other head of the church but the Lord Jesus Christ." (chap. 25. § 6.); and that, he, as "king and head of his church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of church officers, distinct from the civil magistrate. To these officers the keys of the kingdom are committed." (chap. 30. § 1. 2.) Yea, the very passage appealed to in support of the objection begins with the following pointed declaration: "The civil magistrate may not assume to himself the keys of the kingdom of heaven." (chap. 23. § 3.) "The keys of the kingdom of heaven" include all the power exercised in the church, under Christ, its sole king; not only that which is ordinarily exercised in the government of particular congregations and in censuring offenders, (chap. 30.) but also the power "ministerially to determine controversies of faith, and cases of conscience, to set down rules and directions for the better ordering of the public worship of God, and government of his church, to receive complaints in cases of mal-administration, and authoritatively to determine the same." (chap. 31. § 3.) The Confession teaches that magistrates cannot warrantably assume to themselves the power of doing these things, and what it adds must be understood in a consistency with this declaration. It is true, that it allots to the magistrate a care of religion, and asserts that "he hath authority, and it is his duty to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the church," &c. But is there no order which he can take for having these things

done by the persons and in the way by and in which they ought to be done, without taking the doing of them into his hand, and thus assuming what does not belong to him? The Confession asserts that there is, and proceeds to say: "For the better effecting whereof* he hath power to call synods." And is there any good reason for absolutely denying him this power? When "the unity and peace of the church" are broken and endangered in any country, "the truth of God" is depraved, "blasphemies and heresies" of almost every kind are spreading, "corruptions and abuses in worship" are abounding, and when, the church being disorganized, there is no general authority of an ecclesiastical kind to use means for remedying these evils, may not the civil government of that country warrantably call a synod for that purpose? When the state of the nation, as well as of the church, may be convulsed, and its convulsions may be in a great degree owing to religious disorders, is it not a high duty incumbent on him to take such a step, provided he finds it practicable and advisable? Was not this the state of matters in England when the Westminster Assembly met? Was not the state of matters similar in many respects at the Revolution in Scotland? And may not a crisis of the same kind yet recur? Was there any rational ground to think, at the period of the Westminster Assembly, that such a synod would have met, or, supposing it somehow to have been collected, that it could

* "For the better government and further edification of the church, there ought to be such assemblies as are commonly called Synods or Councils:" *i. e.* for attaining the end better than can be accomplished in smaller meetings of church-officers. (Conf. chap. 31.)

have continued together until it had finished its business, if it had not been convoked, maintained, and protected by the Parliament of England? Do many of those who deny the power in question reflect, that they owe those books which they still, in one degree or another, own as the subordinate standards of their ecclesiastical communion, to a synod which was thus convoked? Do they reflect, that by means of them the interests of religion have been promoted to an incalculable degree, "unity and peace preserved in the church, &c. from the period of their compilation down to the present day, in Scotland, in England, in Ireland, and in America? Or, recollecting these things, are they prepared to take the pen and insert their absolute veto—"The civil magistrate—for the better effecting thereof, hath" NOT "power to call synods?" At the same time it may be observed here, as on the former objection, that it is not asserted, that the magistrate may exercise this power on all occasions and in all circumstances, or whenever there are any evils of a religious kind to correct. It is sufficient that there may be times and circumstances in which he may warrantably exert this power. It is true that the Confession, in another place, (chap. 31. § 2.) is not sufficiently full and explicit in declaring the intrinsic right of the church to convoke synods. But this defect was supplied by the Act of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland receiving and approving of the Confession *; and in the Formula used in the Secession from the beginning an approbation of the Confession is required "as received" by that Act of Assembly.

* See Act of Assembly, prefixed to all our copies of the Confession of Faith. Agreeably to this Act was the Confession ratified by the Parliament of Scotland.

After stating that the magistrate has power to call synods, it is added, " to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them, be according to the mind of God." Not to insist here, that these words ought, in fair construction, to be understood of such synods as have been convoked by the magistrate, what reasonable objection can be made to his being present? May he not claim a right to be present at any public meeting within his dominions? May he not be present in a synod to witness their proceedings, to preserve their external peace, to redress their grievances, or (why not?) to receive their advice or admonitions? But, if it be supposed that his presence is necessary to give validity to their proceedings, and that he sits as preses of their meeting, or as director of their deliberations and votes, I shall only say that the words of the Confession give not the slightest countenance to such claims, which are utterly inconsistent with the common principles of Presbyterians, and in particular with the well-known and avowed principles of the Church of Scotland. A similar answer may be given to the objection against the last clause of the paragraph. May not any Christian, whatever his station be, " provide that whatsoever is transacted," even in synods, " be according to the mind of God?" If the legislature or government of a nation have a special care about religion, or if there is any particular duty at all which they have to discharge respecting it, and particularly if they have power in any case to call synods, must it not in a special manner be incumbent on them to see to this? Nor does this imply that they are in possession of any ecclesiastical powers, or that they pass a public judgment on true and false religion. Their private judgment is sufficient to regulate them in their pub-

lic managements in this as well as on many other subjects, about which they exercise their authority, without sustaining themselves as the proper judges of them, as in the case of many arts, sciences, &c. which they patronize and encourage. Must not Christian rulers, judges, and magistrates provide that "whatsoever is transacted" by themselves, "be according to the mind of God?" Is it not highly fit that they should be satisfied, and that they should by every proper means provide that the determinations of synods be according to the mind of God, if they are afterwards to legalize them, or if they are to use their authority for removing all external obstructions out of the way of their being carried into effect; both of which they may do, without imposing them on the consciences of their subjects? And, in fine, are there not various ways in which they may provide as here stated, without assuming a power foreign to their office, or intruding on the proper business of synods, or ecclesiastical courts? But, if it be supposed that the magistrate, as the proper judge in such matters, is to controul the deliberations of the ecclesiastical assembly, to prescribe and dictate to them what their decisions shall be, or that, when they have deliberated and decided, he may receive appeals from their decisions, or may bring the whole before his tribunal, and review, alter, and reverse their sentences, I have only to say, as formerly, that the words of the Confession give not the slightest countenance to such claims, which are utterly inconsistent with the common principles of Presbyterians, and in particular with the well-known and avowed principles and contendings of the Church of Scotland.

But though I consider these objections as destitute of a solid foundation, yet, as the construction on which

they proceed has often been put on the passages to which they refer, I, for my part, can see no good reason why an explanation should not be given of these passages, or of the doctrine contained in them, with the view of preventing all misconception of the sentiments of those who approve of the Confession; provided the two following things are attended to. In the first place, that this declaration do not fix on the Confession the obnoxious sentiments which are disclaimed. And, in the second place, that it do not, under the cover of general and ambiguous expressions, invalidate or set aside the general doctrine respecting the exercise of civil authority about religion which is recognized in the Westminster Confession, and in those of all Protestant Churches. Explanations of this kind were given in the early papers of the Secession, which are sufficient to shew that they entertained no principles favourable to persecution or injurious to the liberties and independence of the church, and that they did not view the Confession as containing such principles *.

That magistrates are not exempted from all concern about religion in their public and official capacity, and that civil authority ought to be employed, and is capable in different ways of being employed, for the advancement of religion, and, in Christian countries, for the good of the church, is a doctrine, which, in my opinion, is not only true, but of great practical importance. I shall state, as briefly as I can, the grounds on which I consider this doctrine as resting, and the leading explications and qualifications with which it has been received among Pres-

* Act and Testimony, apud Display, i. 156—159. and Answers to Nairn, ibid. p. 311—314.

byterians, and particularly in the Secession. The general doctrine seems equally consonant to the dictates of sound reason, the maxims of good policy, and the uniform tenor and express declarations of Scripture. The obligations and the practice of religion in some degree must be supposed to exist antecedently to the erection of social institutions among mankind. It enters into all the duties and offices of life; and none are at liberty to overlook or be indifferent about its interests in any relation in which they stand, or in reference to any connection which they may form. It is the firmest bond of social union, the most efficient check on power, the strongest security for obedience, the principal source of justice, fidelity, humanity, and all the virtues. In framing their laws, all nations, ancient and modern, have availed themselves of its sanctions, and made provision in one way or another for that worship which they practised. And the principle on which they acted was expressly recognized, and applied to the true religion, in the only system of national polity that ever was prescribed immediately by Heaven. It would be strange if a people professing Christianity should give the first example of a nation settling its fundamental laws and regulating the administration of its government, without acknowledging the God that is above, making any provision for the maintenance of his honour, or requiring any religious qualifications whatever in those who were to rule over it. It would be stranger still, if it should be argued that Christianity itself requires this, and that it forbids any homage being done to its founder by national laws, or any service being performed to him by their administrators.

" The public good of outward and common order in all reasonable society, to the glory of God, is the great and only end which those invested with Magistracy can propose in a sole respect unto that office*." This distinguishes their office from that of ministers of the gospel, which is versant about " the disorders of men's hearts." But it does not surely mean, that there is nothing incumbent on magistrates but the employment of physical force in restraining men from committing injuries, or in putting down riots and seditions. The prevention of crimes and disorders is a more important object than their punishment. A right to accomplish any end implies a right to use all the means that are necessary or conducive to the gaining of that end. And of all the means which are calculated to preserve order, to repress crimes, and to promote the public and general good of society, the most powerful beyond all reasonable doubt is religion. On this ground it becomes one of the first duties of those who are entrusted with the care of the public weal of a nation, to preserve and cherish a sense of religion on the minds of the people at large, and for this purpose to give public countenance and decided encouragement to its institutions. And the more pure and perfect—the more free from imposture, falsehood, error, superstition, and other corruptions—the more certain in its foundation and the more forcible in its motives, that any system of religion is, the higher claims must it have to public countenance, both on the ground of its intrinsic truth and authority, and on account of its superior practical influence and utility. This is not to make religion an engine of state. It is to use it for one of those ends which it is calculated in its own

* Answers to Nairn, ut supra, p. 311.

nature to serve, and which its Author intended it should serve: it is to make the ordinances and the institutions of God mutually subservient, and thus to promote in a more extensive way his glory and the good of his creatures. Thus, as it is incumbent on all men to employ every lawful means, in their several stations, for advancing the true religion, the duty of the enlightened and patriotic Magistrate, and the duty of the pious and public-spirited Christian who may hold that office, become so far coincident, and a uniform manner of action, according to the complex character which the individual sustains, is produced.

Magistracy is common to mankind at large, whether living within or without the church. It supposes them capable of religion, and practising it in some shape under the moral government of God; but as it is founded on natural principles, and on the moral laws (which was prior to the Christian faith and more extensively known), it would be absurd to suppose that it was instituted by the Mediator, or that it has the supernatural things peculiar to Christianity for its direct and proper object. "As the whole institution and end of the office are cut out by, and lie within the compass of natural principles, it were absurd to suppose, that there could or ought to be any exercise thereof towards its end, in the foresaid circumstances, but what can be argued for and defended from natural principles: as, indeed, there is nothing especially allotted and allowed to Magistrates by the word of God and the Confessions of the Reformed Churches, but what can be so *." This establishes the power in question on its proper and broadest basis,

* Answers to Naim, ut sup.

as extending to natural religion, whether more imperfectly understood without revelation, or more fully explained in the Bible. But then it is to be observed, that religion and morality in all the extent to which they were contained in the law of nature, are taken into the system of Christianity. There is—there can be—no such thing as a distinct profession or practice of natural religion in Christian countries. And, consequently, there could be no objects of a religious kind, in such countries, about which magistratical power could be employed, unless it were to regard them as existing in the constitution of the Christian Church, and see to the observance of them as enforced by immediate divine authority, and connected with supernatural mysteries. To deny, therefore, that civil rulers have a right to do this, would be to represent the gospel as making void instead of establishing the law, and as invalidating that authority and abridging those powers, which the God of nature had instituted and conferred for the wisest and most beneficial purposes. When duly and wisely employed about the external concernments of the Church, as a visible society erected in the world, so as to be really serviceable to her interests, civil authority becomes doubly a blessing to a people, and as such it was repeatedly promised to Christian nations in the prophetic scriptures both of the Old and New Testament. But in this case there is no addition of power to magistracy, but merely an application of its common power, under the direction of its original general law, to a particular object, which is brought under its cognizance in some periods and places of the world. The kingdom of Christ, though not *of* is *in* this world; as externally set up among men it is entitled to all the support and countenance which

any ordinance of God can give it; and as its spirituality does not render it incapable of being injured by the kingdoms of this world, so neither does it render it incapable of being benefited by them. Church and State are essentially distinct and independent of each other. But kingdoms and powers which are independent may surely maintain a friendly alliance; they may assist and support each other; and, although the one cannot make laws which are binding on the other, yet they may make laws which both tend and are intended for mutual advantage. Presbyterians have stated with as great clearness as those of any other denomination—I may safely say, with greater clearness—the divine origin, the independence, the spirituality, the heavenly constitution of the kingdom of Christ, and its distinction from secular kingdoms in its laws, administration, subjects, offices, judicatories, and special ends. But in perfect consistency with all this, they have maintained that civil and ecclesiastical societies may sustain friendly relations; that they may be helpful to each other; that they may have certain common objects about which both may be employed in a distinct manner, and a common end beside that which is peculiar to each; that the co-operation of temporal and spiritual power may be necessary for introducing or securing a public reformation of religion, when it is opposed by violence, or when a corrupt system has established itself in all the departments of society; and that civil authority, in ordinary times, may be exerted in securing and preserving the church in the peaceable, full, and permanent enjoyment of her peculiar liberties, government, and institutions. A civil establishment of a particular religion or church does not necessarily imply a power of legislating to the faith and consciences of Chris-

tians ; nor an imposing of matters purely religious or of supernatural things as such, by civil penalties ; nor a depriving of subjects of their natural and civil privileges simply on the ground of their dissent. Besides, there are various ways in which religion may be an object of public attention, and be encouraged by those who are in civil authority, supreme and subordinate, without their attempting to establish a particular system, which, in many cases, would be impracticable or highly improper ; as when the mass of the people may be grossly ignorant of Christianity or superstitiously attached to a corrupt form of it, or when a nation may be greatly divided in their religious opinions and practice.

But it is not the design of these pages to enlarge on this subject. Before dismissing it, however, I have two general remarks to make. In the first place, it is, to say the least, extremely inadvertent to represent this as a subject of mere speculation, on which Christians are called to form no opinion. Not to specify here the various practical lights in which the question may be viewed, it may be sufficient to mention, that national laws and their administration, whether in favour of a true or a false religion, have always had, and must have, great influence upon the opinions and conduct of the mass of the people. Religious establishments exist in our own country, and are daily productive of good or evil : we must either approve or condemn them in whole, or we must do so in part ; but how can we do either, if we have no formed principles on the subject? In the second place, it is still more unreasonable to hold out that this is a matter of mere speculation to Seceders. After the statement that has been given of their principles ;—after their express approbation of the national covenants, of

the Westminster Confession, of the civil reformation of Scotland, and the laws establishing the protestant and presbyterian religion;—after their condemnation of the rescission of these laws at the Restoration;—after their pointed censures of the Revolution-settlement on such grounds as the following, that "Prelacy is never considered as contrary to the word of God—nor our Presbyterian church-government and discipline as what the land is bound and obliged to maintain by the most solemn oaths and covenants;—and all the legal securities given to this church, in that covenanting period from 1638 to 1650, are overlooked and passed by *;"—and after having made their testimony on these heads the matter of a solemn vow and oath,—it surely cannot be maintained, that they have no immediate or practical interest in the doctrine which teaches, that civil authority may be warrantably employed about matters of religion and relating to the church. The truth is, that this doctrine is not only necessarily implied in their religious profession, but it will be found running through the whole of it, so that it is impossible to separate the one from the other without disordering and taking in pieces the entire system. I do not mean by this, that they must decide and be agreed upon all the questions that have been or may be started on this subject: this would be absurd in reference to ecclesiastical power, and much more so as to civil. All that is required is, that they hold those general principles on this head of doctrine which are implied in, or are necessary to support, the express approvals of the national reformation, and condemnations of the

* Act and Testimony, ut sup. p. 86—7. Acknowledgement of Sins, ib. p. 230. Answers to Nairn, ib. p. 286—7.

national deformation, which formed so prominent a part of their public profession, and by which they were from the first distinguished as Seceders.

It will not be expected that I should enter here into an examination of the accusations brought against Presbyterians, as chargeable with intolerant and persecuting proceedings during the period of the Solemn League. I confine myself to the following general observations. In the *first* place, Seceders never pledged themselves by an approbation of all the acts and proceedings either of the state or of the church during that period. Their approbation of them was limited *. So far as it can be shewn that any acts of the church encroached on due Christian liberty, or that any acts of the state subjected good and peaceable subjects to punishment for matters purely religious, or imposed on them hardships which did not necessarily result from measures requisite to promote the public good and preserve the national safety, the principles of Seceders do not permit them to justify the conduct of the covenanters.

In the *second* place, the charges on this head are in some instances groundless, and in others greatly exaggerated. The fact is, that this period of the history of Britain has been most grossly misrepresented, and erroneous and distorted views of the great transactions by which it was distinguished, and of the characters and actions of the men who were principally engaged in them, have at last become general, and, in some points, almost universal †. By the most the nature

* Act and Testimony, ut sup. p. 62. Answers to Nairn, ib. p. 283.

† I cannot help saying, that Presbyterians have shewn themselves strangely negligent in counteracting these false views; and

of the cause in which the covenanters were embarked, the enemies by whom they were opposed, and the dangers with which they were surrounded, are not understood or not duly adverted to. The work

I wish I had no reason for adding, that they have suffered for their supineness by becoming the dupes of misrepresentation. Mr Neal's History of the Puritans, a work which has been extensively read, affords a striking exemplification of this. Examinations of it, or counter-statements in those instances in which they considered their connections as injured by the author, have been published by Episcopalians, Baptists, Quakers, and Socinians. Nothing of this kind has appeared from Presbyterians, although it might easily be shewn that they had as much ground for complaint as any of the parties mentioned. The general merits of that work should have been an inducement to them to point out its mistakes, which were more readily credited than the grosser errors of less informed and more prejudiced writers.

I can only give one instance here. After stating the Presbyterian opinion concerning "the power of the keys," or of church-government, he adds: "The Independents claimed a like power for the brotherhood of every particular congregation, *but without any civil sanctions or penalties annexed.*" (Hist. of Puritans, vol. iii. p. 266. Toulmin's ed.) Now, the annexation of civil penalties did not enter into the claim of the Presbyterians, in their disputes in favour of the divine right of church-government in general, or of Presbytery. But, if it had entered into their claim (as I grant some of them in their writings vindicated the propriety of the annexation), still it would have formed no distinction between them and the Independents; the latter themselves being judges. "If the Magistrates power (to which *we give as much*, and, as we think, MORE than the principles of the Presbyterial government will suffer them to yield) do but assist and back the sentence of other churches denouncing this non-communion against churches miscarrying, according to the nature of the crime, as they judge meet—then, without all controversie this our way of church proceeding will be every way as effectual as their other can be supposed to be" &c. (Apologetical Narration, by the five Dissenting Members of the Assembly of Divines, p. 18.)

to which they were called did not consist in the correction of simple errors in doctrine, or corruptions which merely affected worship, ecclesiastical discipline, and Christian morals. It had for its object the removal of evils which were hurtful both in a religious and political view, and by which the liberties of church and state were equally affected. Prelacy was not only a deviation from the institution of Christ, which was to be confuted and removed by an appeal to scriptural authority and argument; but secular power, external violence, and political tyranny were annexed to it, and interwoven with the whole form and proceedings of the hierarchy. Bishops were not only domineering lords in the church; they were also tools in the hands of arbitrary monarchs and persecuting statesmen. Again, these evils were owing in a great measure to the exorbitant prerogative of the crown, from which, in consequence of the ecclesiastical supremacy vested in it, arose the arbitrary proceedings of the bishops' courts, and the illegal powers of the High Commission. While the ecclesiastical grievances sprung from political abuses, the political grievances might be traced in their turn to ecclesiastical abuses; and religion and policy equally demanded the correction of both. A co-operation of the several powers, and of the means competent to them, was therefore requisite. The use of religious means was primarily needful for giving life and animation to the work; but these alone could not redress all grievances. Means of a very different kind were necessary to restrain violence, to curb tyranny, to abolish the laws authorizing the evils complained of, and to substitute others in their place. If forcible opposition was made to this, or if conspiracies and factions were formed for the main-

tenance or restitution of the old oppressive system, it was necessary to employ law and penalties for restraining or suppressing such attempts. In conducting any common measures having for their object the general good of society, civil or ecclesiastical, it is impossible altogether to avoid interfering with private liberty, or subjecting individuals to hardships and restraints which in some way affect their consciences and the full enjoyment of their religious privileges. Undeniable examples of this in recent times might be produced from the proceedings of religious societies which have no immediate connection with government. In the prosecution of the complex reformation in which our forefathers were engaged, opposed, as it was, by such adversaries as we have described, and while an intestine war raged in the country, it was not only extremely difficult for them to steer an even course, but it was impossible for them to avoid imposing restraints which would have been improper in an ordinary state of affairs; and tenderness apart, we ought to be cautious in censuring their conduct, as it may turn out, on an accurate knowledge of all the facts, that measures which at first view appeared intolerant or unreasonably severe were indispensibly necessary to the public safety. Nor should we overlook the character and designs of the sectaries, who rose on the suppression of the arbitrary and malignant party; and whose claims on the head of liberty of conscience were resisted, by men decidedly averse to the use of force in religious matters, as dangerous to the religion, liberties, and peace of the three kingdoms *. If the state of parties and the

* See the lives of Gataker and Lightfoot, in Biographia Britannica, vol. iv. p. 2166. vol. v. p. 2293.

circumstances of the time be narrowly investigated, it will appear, I think, that the public proceedings, so far from being obnoxious to the charge of persecution, were upon the whole marked with uncommon lenity and tenderness, even amidst open war and the plots and cabals of factions, political and religious; and that that period, instead of being distinguished by restrictions on opinions and practices, was rather noted for the relaxation of ecclesiastical discipline and penal laws, and for a more licentious freedom and greater diversity of religion than ever prevailed in any period of British history.

In the *third* place, the most exceptionable acts and proceedings took place in consequence of the rejection of those salutary measures which the Presbyterians had advised. Suffice it to state here, that, in consequence of the opposition of the Independents on the one hand and the Erastians on the other, the settlement of ecclesiastical government and discipline, according to the plan agreed on by the Westminster Assembly, was delayed from time to time, and ultimately refused by the Parliament of England. In this disorganized state of the church, disorders of various kinds took place, innumerable sects sprung up, and errors and blasphemies, formerly unheard of and shocking to Christian ears, were every where propagated. Alarmed at these appearances, and seeing matters fast tending to anarchy and confusion in the nation, the Parliament took the affair into their own hands, and published an ordinance intended to check and punish these evils. The Presbyterians by their declarations and petitions may be brought in as accessory to this measure; but it ought not to be forgotten that they had predicted the consequences which would arise

from the dilatory proceedings of parliament; that they had uniformly testified an earnest desire to have religious errors and disorders corrected by spiritual means; and had avowed their conviction, that a scriptural discipline, if erected and allowed freely to exert itself, would accomplish that desirable end, without the interposition of any secular violence *.

* In a work published two years before the time now referred to, Mr Baillie made the following striking declaration: "Now, indeed, every monster walks in the street without controlement, while all ecclesiastic government is east asleep; this too too long inter-reign and mere anarchy hath invited every unclean creature to ereep out of its eave, and shew in publike its mishapen face to all, who like to behold. But, if once the government of Christ were set up amongst us, as it is in the rest of the reformed churches, we know not what would impede it, by the sword of God alone, *without any secular violence*, to banish out of the land these spirits of error, in all meekness, humility, and love, by the force of truth convincing and satisfying the minds of the seduced. Episcopal courts were never fitted for the reclaiming of minds; their prisons, their fines, their pillories, their nose-shittings, their ear-cuttings, their cheek-burnings, did but hold down the flame to break out in season with the greater rage. But, the reformed Presbytery doth proceed in a spiritual method evidently fitted for the gaining of hearts.—It is not prophecy, but a rational prediction bottomed upon reasons and multiplied experience: Let England once be countenanced by her superior powers, to enjoy the just and necessary liberty of consistories for congregations, of presbyteries for counties, of synods for larger shires, and national assemblies for the whole land, as Scotland hath long possessed these by the unanimous consent of king and parliament, without the least prejudice to the civil state, but to the evident and confessed benefit thereof; or as the very protestants in France, by the concession of a popish state and king, have enjoyed all these four spiritual courts the last fourscore years and above: Put these holy and divine instruments in the hand of the Church of England, by the blessing of God thereupon, the sore and great evil of so many heresies and schisms shall quickly be cured, which now not only troubles the peace

The last class of objections to which I propose adverting is that which relates to the Solemn League and Covenant. It will not be expected that I should say any thing here in the way of direct answer to those who find fault with the matter of that deed, or who deny the lawfulness and binding force of all covenants about matters of religion. The following considerations may perhaps tend to obviate some of the difficulties which are felt respecting the form, enactment, and obligation of the Solemn League. Covenants and oaths are of the same general nature, and retain their proper and primary design, by whomsoever they are employed, and to whatever purposes they may be applied. Their lawfulness, utility, and obligation are recognized among all people, and recourse has been had to them on all great occasions that required their interposition. Revelation teaches more explicitly and corroborates their warrants and obligations, discovers new objects about which they may employed, and gives directions as to the proper manner of performing these and other acts of moral duty. It expressly ascertains their use and application to moral and religious purposes, as well as to the ordinary affairs of human society. There is a law of morality and religion common to men; and the use of these bonds of fidelity in the peculiar concerns of Christains, or of ecclesiastical societies, does not abolish or supersede their use for any other lawful purpose. The gospel neither adds any essential duties to the law, nor confines it within narrower limits as to persons or objects.

and welfare, but hazards the very subsistence both of church and kingdom: *without this mean, the State will toil itself in vain about the cure of such spiritual diseases.*" (Baillie's Dissuasive from the Errors of the Time, pref. p. 7, 8.)

Covenants and oaths are sacred in themselves, independently of the matter of them. In respect of their matter and immediate end they may be civil, political, or ecclesiastical, or they may be of a mixed kind, in which objects of a different nature are combined for the better attaining of some great purpose of public good; they may be private or public; spontaneous, and about matters to which persons were not previously bound, or framed and enjoined by authority; more general or particular; more extensive or limited; temporary or perpetual. They may formally consist in mutual stipulations between individuals or bodies of men, or they may consist in a common engagement to God, which is the strongest and most solemn way in which men can become bound to one another. They may relate to the intrinsic affairs of a church, or to the external state and interests of churches and nations. Any of these are lawful and obligatory when entered into on a due call and on proper grounds. All the temporal and common affairs of men are capable of a religious direction and use, and may be subordinated to the great ends of advancing the divine glory and spiritual interests. No duties moral or religious, can be acceptably performed but by those who are acquainted with the gospel and instated in the covenant of grace; but this must not be confounded with their warrants or obligations. Of covenanting considered as a public duty performed by Christians solely in their ecclesiastical capacity—of the distinction between it and those engagements, virtual or actual, which are constitutive of churches or of church membership,—of the distinction between it and the act of faith which brings persons to an interest in the covenant of grace, and ought not to be viewed as a promise of fidelity or engagement either

to God or man—of the additional formality and solemn sanctions which discriminate it from that open profession of interest in God and obedience to him which is in some way made by all believers and in all churches—and of the special reasons and calls for these high sanctions and pledges,—I do not propose here to speak.

All the noted covenants and leagues in which the interests of the Reformation throughout Europe were so deeply concerned, were of a mixed kind. They contained engagements on the part of the confederates to defend one another in the profession of the Protestant religion, or in throwing off the authority of Rome, and correcting abuses, which were partly religious and partly political. They were entered into by public men, in their several secular capacities, as well as religious, and even by corporate bodies. Such was the League of Smalcalde, of the Swiss Cantons, and of the Evangelic Body in Germany; and the Covenants of the Protestant princes and towns in France, and in the Netherlands. Such also were the National Covenants in Britain. The Solemn League was a complex deed, both in its form, and in its matter. It was not only a covenant with God, but also between people and people, for reciprocal benefit, and on certain mutual terms: security was stipulated on the one part and aid on the other, in the prosecution of its great objects. Religion formed the great and principal matter of it, but the promoting of this was not its sole object. National reformation and uniformity were combined with national liberty, safety, peace, loyalty, and law. It was adapted to "the dangerous, distressed, and deplorable estate" of the three "kingdoms," as well as of the "churches" in them. It was not, therefore, a mere church-covenant, but was framed, sworn,

enjoined, and promoted by the public authorities of both church and state.

Some condemn this as an improper blending of heterogeneous matter, and think that our ancestors ought to have framed two separate covenants—one in defence of their civil liberties, and another for religious purposes. If those who express this opinion will make the trial, I apprehend they will find in it articles (and these not the least important), which they will be unable to dispose of, without making a third covenant, to be taken by all, or else adding them to each of the two, as equally pertaining to both. In either way they will inevitably plunge into what they call the old error of blending. There were peculiar duties which those in civil, and even in military stations, owed respecting the articles which were of a religious complexion; and, *vice versa*, there were duties which ministers of the gospel and church courts owed respecting those which were civil, political, or military. The truth is, there is no article in the Solemn League that is either purely civil, or purely religious. The civil things in it were connected with the religious, and the religious bore a relation to the national state and policy at that time. An accurate acquaintance with the circumstances in which our ancestors were placed, will, I presume, fully justify the measure they adopted, and shew that they acted with the greatest wisdom, when they embodied in one common engagement to God and among themselves those things which providence had joined together, and thus secured the vigorous and combined exertions of the friends of religion and liberty in a cause that was common to both. Nor did this imply any undue blending of things which, though connected, are in their nature distinct, nor any confounding of the consti-

tution and powers of church and state, or of the respective offices and duties of the covenanters. It may just as well be said, (to make use of a familiar comparison), that, when a mason and carpenter enter into a joint contract to finish a building, there is a confusion of trades, and that the one is to labour in the occupation of the other, instead of doing each his own work, and providing what is common to both. To separate the civil part of the covenant from the religious, and judge of it piece-meal, is to proceed on a fanciful supposition of something that never had an existence. As one complex and undivided whole was it framed, enacted, sworn, promoted ; and as one whole must it be judged, and stand or fall.

The manner in which the covenant was enjoined to be taken in Scotland—" under all civil pains," has not been approved by Seceders in any of their public papers. Private writers of their connection who have vindicated the injunction-clause, have not considered it as extending beyond exclusion from places of power and trust. Whatever may be the legal import of the phrase, I believe this interpretation accords with the fact ; and, so far as I know, it cannot be shewn, that, with the consent and approbation of the public authorities, the covenant was forced upon any, or that the loss of liberty or of goods was incurred by them for simply refusing it. I frankly confess, that I have not yet seen any good reason, in point of religion, justice, or good policy, for condemning the exclusion of those who did not take the Solemn League from places of authority and public trust. It was the great bond of union, and test of fidelity, among those who were embarked in that cause in defence of which the Parliaments had already drawn their swords. A due regard to the high interests

which were at stake, as well as their own safety and the maxims of prudence by which all people are guided in similar circumstances, required that they should carefully distinguish between those who were well or ill affected to their cause, and that they should not entrust the more active management and defence of it to such as were of the latter description. In the extraordinary circumstances in which they were placed, a mixed test, partly civil and partly religious, became so far necessary to ascertain common friends and foes. There might be (I have no doubt there were) individuals peaceably disposed, and even friendly to the cause of the Parliaments, so far as civil liberty was concerned, who yet scrupled at the stipulations in the covenant which related to religion. But laws cannot be made for individuals; it belonged to the public authorities to determine what description of persons it was safe, in the peculiar circumstances, to entrust with power; and in times of national confusion, danger, and war, when all that is valuable to a people may be put in jeopardy, individuals may be required to forego or may be restricted in the exercise of those rights which, in an ordinary and quiet state of society, they may be entitled to claim. The vindicating of such tests in certain times and in reference to certain parties, does not imply an approval of them in times or in reference to parties of a very different description.

The continued obligation of our National Covenants, is of greater importance than any particular measure adopted in prosecuting them. In what I have to say on this branch of the subject, I shall keep the Solemn League more particularly in eye, both because it comprehends the substance of the National Covenant of Scotland, and because it has

been the object of more frequent attack. It is not every lawful covenant, nor even every lawful covenant of a public nature, that is of permanent obligation. Some of both kinds, from their very nature or from other circumstances, may undoubtedly be temporary. The permanent obligation of the Solemn League results from the permanency of its nature and design, and of the parties entering into it, taken in connection with the public capacity in which it was established. Some talk of it as it were a mere temporary expedient to which our forefathers had recourse in defending their civil and religious liberties; and, when they have paid a compliment to it in this point of view, they think they have no more concern with the matter. This is a very narrow and mistaken view of the deed. The most momentous transactions, and most deeply and durably affecting the welfare and the duty of nations and of churches, may be traced to the influence of the extraordinary and emergent circumstances of a particular period. The emergency which led to the formation of the covenant is one thing, and the obligation of that covenant is quite another: the former might quickly pass away, while the latter may be permanent and perpetual. Nor is the obligation of the covenant to be determined by the temporary or changeable nature of its subordinate and accessory articles. Whatever may be said of some of the things engaged to in the Solemn League, there cannot be a doubt that in its great design and leading articles it was not temporary but permanent. Though the objects immediately contemplated by it—religious reformation and uniformity—had been accomplished, it would still have continued to oblige those who were under its bond to adhere to and maintain these attainments. But

unhappily there is no need of having recourse to this line of argument: its grand stipulations remain to this day unfulfilled. The Solemn League was a national covenant and oath, in every point of view,—in its matter, its form, the authority by which it was enjoined the capacities in which it was sworn, and the manner in which it was ratified. It was a sacred league between kingdom and kingdom with respect to their religious as well as their secular interests, and at the same time a covenant in which they jointly swore to God to perform all the articles contained in it. National religion, national safety, liberty and peace, were the great objects which it embraced. It was not a mere agreement or confederation (however solemn) of individuals or private persons (however numerous), entering spontaneously and of their own accord into a common engagement. It was framed and concluded by the representatives of kingdoms in concurrence with those of the church; it was sworn by them in their public capacity; at their call and by their authority, it was afterwards sworn by the body of the people in their different ranks and orders; and finally it was ratified and pronounced valid by laws both civil and ecclesiastical. The public faith was thus plighted by all the organs through which a nation is accustomed to express its mind and will. Nothing was wanting to complete the national tie, and to render it permanent; unless it should be maintained that absolute unanimity is necessary, and that a society cannot contract lawful engagements to God or man, as long as there are individuals who oppose and are dissentient. Sanctions less sacred, and pledges less numerous, would have given another nation, or even an individual, a perfect right to demand from Britain the fulfilment of any treaty or contract; and shall not

God, who was not only a witness but the principal party, and whose honour and interests were immediately concerned, in this transaction, have a like claim; or shall we "break the covenant and escape?"

Some of the principles on which it has been attempted to loose this sacred tie, are so opposite to the common sentiments of mankind, that it is not necessary to refute them; such as, that covenants, vows, and oaths, cannot superadd any obligation to that which we are previously under by the law of God; and, that their obligation on posterity consists merely in the influence of example. There is another objection which is of a more specious kind and lays claim to greater accuracy, but which on examination will be found both unsolid and inaccurate. It is pleaded, that it is only in the character of church-members that persons can enter into religious covenants or be bound by them; and that the covenants of this country can be called national on no other ground than because the majority of the inhabitants in their individual character voluntarily entered into them. At present I can only state some general considerations tending to shew the fallacy of this view of the subject. By church-members may be meant either those who are in actual communion with a particular organized church, or those who stand in a general relation to the church universal; but in neither of these senses can it be said that religious covenants or bonds are incompetent or non-obligatory in every other character. This is to restrict the authority of the divine law in reference to moral duties, and to limit the obligations which result from it, in a way that is not warranted either by Scripture, or reason. How can that which is founded on the moral law, and

which is moral-natural, not positive, be confined to church-members, or to Christians in the character of church-members only? The doctrine in question is also highly objectionable, as it unduly restricts the religious character of men, and the sphere of their action about religious matters, whether viewed as individuals or as formed into societies and communities. They are bound to act for the honour of God, and are capable of contracting sacred obligations, (sacred both in their nature and in their objects) in all the characters and capacities which they sustain. I know no good reason for holding that when a company of men or a society act about religion, or engage in religious exercises, they are thereby converted into a church, or act merely and properly as church-members. Families are not churches, nor are they constituted properly for a religious purpose; yet they have a religious character, and are bound to act according to it in honouring and serving God, and are capable of contracting religious obligations. Nations also have a religious character, and may act about the affairs of religion. They may make their profession of Christianity, and legally authorize its institutions, without being turned into a church; and why may they not also come under an oath and covenant with reference to it, which shall be nationally binding? Covenanting may be said to be by a nation as brought into a church-state, acting in this religious capacity—the oath may be dispensed by ministers of the gospel and accompanied by the usual exercises of religion in the church, and yet it may not be an ecclesiastical deed. The marriage-covenant and vow is founded on the original law, and its duties, as well as the relation which it establishes, are common to men, and of a civil kind. Yet

among Christians it is mixed with religious engagements, and celebrated religiously in the church. Ministers of the gospel officiate in dispensing the vow, and accompany it with the word and prayer. The parties are bound to marry in the Lord, and to live together as Christians. But is the marriage vow on that account ecclesiastical, or do the parties engage as church-members only? The Christian character is, in such cases, combined with the natural, domestic, civil, political. Much confusion also arises on this subject from not attending to the specific object of our National Covenants, and the nature of their stipulations, by which they are distinguished from mere church-covenants. I shall only add that several objections usually adduced on this head may be obviated by keeping in mind, that the obligation in question is of a moral kind, and that God is the principal party who exacts the fulfilment of the bond.

If there is any truth in the statements that have now been made, the question respecting the obligation of the British covenants is deeply interesting to the present generation. The identity of a nation, as existing through different ages, is, in all moral respects, as real as the identity of an individual through the whole period of his life. The individuals that compose it, like the particles of matter in the human body, pass away and are succeeded by others; but the body politic continues essentially the same. If Britain contracted a moral obligation, in virtue of a solemn national covenant for religion and reformation, that obligation must attach to her until it has been discharged. Have the pledges given by the nation been yet redeemed? Do not the principal stipulations in the covenant remain unfulfilled at this day? Are we not as a people still

bound by that engagement to see these things done? Has the lapse of time cancelled the bond? Or, will a change of sentiments and views set us free from its tie? Is it not the duty of all the friends of reformation to endeavour to keep alive a sense of this obligation on the public mind? But, although all ranks and classes in the nation should lose impressions of it, and although there should not be a single religious denomination, nor even a single individual, in the land, to remind them of it, will it not be held in remembrance by One, with whom "a thousand years are as one day, and one day as a thousand years?"

By this time the reader must be aware of the general opinion which I entertain of the basis on which the two largest Synods of the Secession have lately united. It is not my intention to enter into any particular examination of the articles of that agreement. Complexly taken they afford undeniable proof of a complete recession from the ground originally occupied by Seceders. The exception made to the Westminster Confession of Faith and Catechisms, is expressed in such a way as to leave on them the imputation of teaching persecuting principles in matters of religion, and in such a way as to set aside, or to throw loose, the whole doctrine which they teach respecting the exercise of magistratical authority about these matters: Besides, the united Synod merely "retain" these books, "as (to use their own words) the confession of our faith, expressive of the sense in which we understand the Holy Scriptures;" but do not receive them, as was formerly done by the the Church of Scotland and in the Secession, under the consideration of their being subordinate standards of uniformity for the three nations. The other stand-

ards, the Westminster "Form of Church-government," and "Directory," are entirely excluded from the Basis. The general statement on the head of Presbyterian government is chargeable with ambiguity, and, unless inadvertency be pleaded, is evasive. The expression of veneration for our Reforming ancestors, and of a warm sense of the value of their efforts "in the cause of civil and religious liberty," I have no doubt, is "unfeigned;" and the approval of "the method adopted by them for mutual excitement and encouragement by solemn confederation and vows tó God," is so far good. But I must be allowed to add, that this is saying no more than has been often said, by those friends of civil and religious liberty whose system of religion was very opposite to that of our Reforming ancestors; and that it is a very poor substitute for that explicit approbation of and adherence to the Covenanted Reformation of Britain which Seceders formerly avouched. This is all that the United Synod have to say respecting our National Covenants; they "approve of the method adopted—by solemn confederation and vows to God;" but they have not a word to say on the present or continued obligation of these vows. For, surely, it was not expected that the public would consider this as included in the following declaration: "We acknowledge that we are under high obligations to maintain and promote the work of Reformation begun, and to a great extent carried on by them." Nothing, in fact, could be more disgraceful to these covenants than to attempt to bring them in under the cover of such an expression: and, after the open, decided, express, and repeated avowals of the perpetual obligation of the National Covenant of Scotland and the Solemn League and Co-

venant of the three kingdoms, in the former profession, and in the Ordination-formula, of the two bodies now composing the Union, the omission of every thing of this kind, and the careful exclusion of the very names of these covenants, can be viewed in no other light than a practical renunciation of their obligation, and a rescinding of all former declarations in favour of it. If the United Synod were the same with the original Seceding body, how severely would they condemn themselves by the charge which they once and again brought against the Established Church after the Revolution, because "they did not, by any particular act of Assembly, assert the obligation of our Covenants, national and solemn league, and their binding force upon posterity *." On the provision made by the articles for the practice of covenanting, I have only to observe, that this exercise was all along viewed, in that part of the Secession by which it was observed, as the most solemn mode of sealing the common profession of the whole body; that as such it was engaged in at the express call of the supreme judicatory; and that, when the United Synod cannot say that "the circumstances of Providence require it," I can scarcely persuade myself that it is seriously contemplated to practise this sacred service in a manner which would discredit it, and which is totally irreconcilable with Presbyterian principles †. With respect to the religious clause in some Burgess oaths

* Act and Testimony, in Display, i. 90. Acknowledgement of Sins, ib. 231.

† Formerly sessions were left to determine when the performance of the duty was suitable to the circumstances of their respective congregations; but now they must determine whether Providence is requiring the duty, or in other words, whether it be at all a duty incumbent on the church in the present times.

which occasioned the original strife, the preamble to the Basis supposes that there are some "towns where it may still exist," and all the provision it makes with respect to this is, that "both Synods agree to use what may appear to them the most proper means for obtaining the abolition" of it. No provision is made, that, if they shall be unsuccessful in their applications for an abolition of it, the oath shall not be taken in the united society; although it is well known that one of the parties had all along maintained that Seceders involved themselves in contradiction by swearing it, and continued down to the time of the Union, to require all intrants to public office among them to declare their solemn approbation of an act condemning it in this point of view. They are thus involved in a judicial allowance of what they hold to be sinful; and have recognized a principle which may be applied to an indefinite extent, and which ought to have been guarded against with the utmost care, as it enters into all the loose plans of communion which are so fashionable in the present day. This is still more evident from the engagement which they have come under, that they "shall carefully abstain from agitating in future the questions which occasioned" the separation. It is proposed that the united Synod shall prepare a Testimony, "containing the substance of the Judicial Act and Testimony, the Act concerning the Doctrine of Grace, and the Answers to Nairn's Reasons of Dissent." What some may understand by *the substance* it may be difficult to say; but if the proposed Testimony really contain the substance of the first and last named of these papers, the basis will not support the superstructure. In answer to all this, some will say, We are at full liberty

to hold all our principles as formerly. But such persons should remember, that the question is not about *their* principles, but the principles, or rather the public profession, of the body; and that it has been chiefly by means of the latter, that the declarative glory of God has been promoted in every age, and his truths and cause preserved and transmitted to posterity.

It is painful to me to be obliged to speak in this manner of the terms of a union, which it would have filled my heart with delight to see established on a solid and scriptural foundation. But in such cases there is a duty incumbent on all the friends of the cause of the Reformation and the Secession: and this they must discharge whatever it may cost them, and regardless of the obloquy that they may hereby incur. They are sacredly bound to adhere to that cause, to confess it, and, according to the calls of providence, to appear openly in its defence. It cannot but be grieving to them to find that the attempt made to heal the breach among its professed friends has discovered that disaffection to it existed to a greater extent than they could have imagined. They may be accused as the enemies of peace and union. But they have this consolation, that they still occupy that ground on which their fathers displayed a faithful testimony for the truths and laws of Christ against prevailing defection; and that they are adhering, without any reservation, or any mark of dissent, to that testimony, and to those books of public authority which were formerly agreed on for settling and preserving religious unity and communion on the most extended scale. And they are encouraged to maintain this ground by the hope which they still cherish, that the

God of their fathers and of their vows, will yet, in his merciful providence, bring round a time of reformation; and that, when this period shall have arrived, the Westminster Standards may form a rallying-point around which the scattered friends of religion, in this land, shall meet, and again happily combine.

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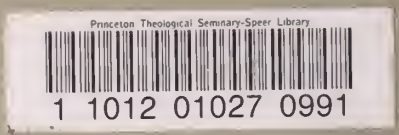
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